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Translation and Decolonisation

Interdisciplinary Approaches

TRANSLATION, POLITICS AND SOCIETY

TRANSLATION AND DECOLONISATION

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Claire Chambers is Professor of Global Literature at the University of York, where she teaches twentieth- and twenty-first-century writing in English from South Asia, the Perso-Arab world, and their diasporas. Her books include *Imagining Muslims in South Asia and the Diaspora*, *Britain Through Muslim Eyes*, and *Making Sense of Contemporary British Muslim Novels*.

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TRANSLATION AND DECOLONISATION

Interdisciplinary Approaches

Edited by Claire Chambers and Ipek Demir

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

Designed cover image: Jane Jardine Design

First published 2024
by Routledge
4 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

and by Routledge
605 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10158

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

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British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-1-032-39919-5 (hbk)
ISBN: 978-1-032-38271-5 (pbk)
ISBN: 978-1-003-35198-6 (ebk)

DOI: 10.4324/9781003351986

Typeset in Sabon
by Apex CoVantage, LLC

Access the Support Material: www.routledgetranslationstudiesportal.com

For Rob and Andy

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Our initial expressions of gratitude are directed towards Esperança Bielsa, whose generous positivity and encouragement enabled us to contribute to the series Translation, Politics, and Society. We appreciate her enthusiasm, steadfast support, and the wisdom and kindness she shared, guiding us to successful completion. Additionally, we extend our thanks to Ruth Berry, Ella McFarlane, Louisa Semlyen, and Talitha Duncan-Todd at Routledge for all their help and advice during the process.

We owe a huge debt of gratitude to Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and to Lisa Black of Princeton University Press for granting permission to republish 'Translating Into English'. Similarly, we gratefully acknowledge Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o and Naveen Kishore of Seagull for allowing us to republish 'Finding Our Way: Dialogue Among Our Languages Is the Way to the Unity of African Peoples'.

Above all, we give heartfelt thanks to all our authors, whose contributions have made this a book to be proud of.

Corinne Fowler, huge kudos for introducing us to each other and kindling our friendship and intellectual journey.

Claire

The collaborative spirit of this book is grounded on conversations with colleagues and friends, including Annie Zaidi, Derek Attridge, Diana Mudura, Hannah Roche, Kieran Connell, Indrani Karmakar, James Williams, Kavita Bhanot, Rachael Gilmour, and Sauleha Kamal. I want to thank Ayesha Manazir Siddiqi for giving me an interview for publication in the *Dawn* newspaper. I'm also grateful to my past and present editors at *Dawn* and *3 Quarks Daily*:

Hasan Zaidi, Rubab Karrar, Sarwat Yasmeen Azeem, Shazia Hasan, and Abbas Raza.

In 2012, I assumed a new academic role within the Department of English and Related Literature at the University of York, after eight happy years at Leeds Beckett (then Metropolitan) University. Immersed in the York department's rich cross-period and multilingual atmosphere, I found inspiration to venture into more and more texts written in languages beyond English. This experience went in tandem with York's extensive training in world literature debates, particularly emphasising the art and artifice of translation. Special appreciation is extended to successive Heads of Department Helen Fulton, David Attwell, Helen Smith, and Jennie Batchelor, for their unwavering belief and support. I know that without the Department's rigorous intellectual environment, I could never have co-edited this book.

Stimulating dialogues with students enrolled in the 'Muslim Translations of Britain' module have significantly advanced the research and writing process. Their engagement has been a crucial aspect of the project's development. Warm thanks to all students past, present, and future on this module: I learn so much from you.

My Hindi and Urdu language teachers and peers deserve a special shout-out. Here's to you: Aakanksha Singh, Ahmad Aqeel Sarwar, Alex Bubb, Anita Süess Kaushik, Aroosa Kanwal, Arunima Theraja, Ashok Gupta, Ashok Malhotra, Ashutosh Agrawal, Babita Craig, Cheena Taneja, Hindi University, Hindi-Urdu Meetup, Idrees Kasbati, Kelly Reineke, Kosen Nomula, Maggie Cummings, Maha Gaida, Mastram ji, Michael Taylor, Omar Qarwan, Raj Pal, Rupert Snell, Sana Riaz, Wafa Arshad, Yusuf Mallu, and Zulfiqar Ali Sajjad. Thanks too to the free apps Duolingo, Mondly, Clozemaster, and ReadAlong Google for gamifying languages and making daily learning an addictive routine.

I express grateful love to my family – Rob, Joash, Derry, Susan, and Richard – for putting up with and taking the mickey out of me. Also to my Leeds friends Caroline Hollick, Emily Zobel Marshall, Esha Sil, Jane Jardine, Haleemah Alaydi, Louisa Ashley, Payal Ganguly, Reena Dhir, Susan Watkins, Varsha Jha, and Zaynab Seedat for providing a sense of perspective and bonhomie. I must also thank my sponsor coffee for fuelling this entire enterprise.

The editing of the present book, which has radically shifted my thinking, would not have materialised without the invitation and camaraderie from Ipek. Since the early days of our friendship, the prospect of collaborating had been an aspiration of mine. I am so happy that this project has made it a reality, allowing us to synergise our interests and complementary strengths.

Ipek

Translation did not come to me. I came to translation through an unusual route: through being introduced to notion of incommensurability by thinkers

in political philosophy and the history and philosophy of science, especially through the works of Thomas Kuhn and Alastair Macintyre. And that amazing intellectual journey was due to John Holmwood, my PhD supervisor at the University of Sussex, and to Martin Kusch, my ESRC postdoctoral supervisor at the University of Cambridge. I owe much gratitude to them both for kindling and advancing my interest in translation and for pushing the boundaries of my thinking on communication, interaction, traditions, and incommensurability. Gurminder K. Bhambra's works and intellectual rigour have continued to advance my understanding of modernity and colonialism, and her support and contributions have been immeasurable throughout. Great exchanges and learning continued at the University of Leicester with Barbara Miszral and Esperança Bielsa – both of whom shaped my understanding of translation and of society through their works, intellectual endeavours, and our many conversations.

I would like to thank colleagues and students at the University of Leeds for fuelling the interest, and pushing my understanding of race, coloniality, diaspora, and decoloniality further. I'm especially grateful to all those at the School of Sociology and Social Policy (SSP) and the Centre for Ethnicity and Racism Studies (CERS), and my wonderful PhD students, including of course the curious and enthusiastic students who have been taking my MA module 'Racism, Decoloniality, and Migration'. They all continue to stimulate my thinking on decolonisation. I would also like to thank my School for granting me a sabbatical during which the bulk of my work for this book was carried out.

Last but not least, I am grateful to Claire for jumping into this book project with me, exploring how translation can be a tool of colonisation but also of decolonisation. She has been not only an amazingly generous, hardworking, and meticulous co-editor but also a sharp, adventurous, and stimulating thinker, collaborator, and friend. Claire, thank you for allowing me not just to raid but also to contribute (albeit modestly) to translation studies.

'Translating Into English' by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak first appeared in Sandra Bermann and Michael Wood (eds.), *Nation, Language and the Ethics of Translation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), pp. 93–110. The essay has been reprinted by permission of Lisa Black for Princeton University Press.

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's 'Finding Our Way: Dialogue Among Our Languages Is the Way to the Unity of African Peoples' was published in Ngũgĩ's *The Language of Languages: Reflections on Translation* (Kolkata: Seagull Books, 2023), pp. 15–32. The essay has been reprinted by permission of Naveen Kishore for Seagull Books.

INTRODUCTION

Translation in the Service of (De)colonisation

Claire Chambers and Ipek Demir

In his most recent book, *El Polaco* (*The Pole*), J. M. Coetzee unsettles the dominance of English and the Global North. He draws attention to a plurality of languages that should co-exist, without one overriding the other. By implication, he also promotes the importance of translation. He does this by resisting first publication of the book in what he sees as dreary and oppressive global English. *The Pole* was written in English but did not get published in that language until 2023 (along with some other stories in July for the UK (2023a), and as a short novel in September for the USA (2023b)). 2022 had been the year of the book's very first publication, in translated form as a novella, by Spanish-language translator Mariana Dimópulos for the Argentinian publisher El Hilo de Ariadna, in the kind of writing that Rebecca Walkowitz had earlier (2015) famously termed 'born translated' literature. *The Pole* explores unrequited love, language, constant misunderstandings, how English as a common language infringes on relationships and intimacy, and music as another mode of communication. Coetzee's two protagonists (a septuagenarian Polish pianist and a woman in her late forties from Barcelona) establish and maintain their relationship through English, although neither of them is a native speaker. This common language is one of many impediments to their love affair thriving. Coetzee not only delayed the first publication of his book in English and intentionally chose to publish it first in the Global South, but he also countered the received view of the easy translatability, communicability, and connectivity of languages in general, and English in particular. In an interview promoting his work at the Welsh Hay Festival of Literature & Arts, he was quoted as saying:

> I do not like the way in which [English] crushes the minor languages that it finds in its path. I don't like its universalist pretensions, by which I mean

DOI: 10.4324/9781003351986-1

> its uninterrogated belief that the world is as it seems to be in the mirror of the English language. I don't like the arrogance that this situation breeds in its native speakers. Therefore, I do what little I can to resist the hegemony of the English language.
>
> (Coetzee, qtd. in Marshall, 2022, n.p.)

Our book, *Translation and Decolonisation: Interdisciplinary Approaches*, comprising diverse and inspiring chapter contributions, seeks to take a further and more radical step. Moving towards an understanding of language, translation, and translating across power differentials, the volume investigates how translation itself can become a vehicle for intervention and of decolonisation. There is a growing willingness to reckon with race and coloniality in academia, museums, and the media. As many jump on the decolonisation bandwagon, however, the concept itself has recently become overused and inflated. It is sometimes even used merely as a metaphor, as criticised, for example, by Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang (2012). The decolonisation of disciplines, knowledge systems, and institutions can be understood, in its simplest form, as 'an ongoing process of identifying and challenging the legacy of colonial structures and associated inherited prejudices of research and teaching' (Demir, 2023, 106). The present collection contributes to ongoing discussions in the UK and internationally about this process of decolonisation. While the decolonising idea sparks heated debate, it also underscores the imperative of addressing the lasting consequences of European colonial history. What is needed, we submit, is active alignment with marginalised communities to work towards a decolonised translation studies.

In the book, our attention thus turns to how translation, having been an instrument of colonisation, can itself become a vehicle for decolonising and undermining imperial frameworks and their related biases and systems. The collection makes an important incursion into the fields of both translation studies and decolonial and postcolonial studies by examining the role translation plays in decolonisation. We see the postcolonial and decolonial traditions as being interlinked, despite their intellectual genealogies emerging from different contexts. Each school of thought arose from European colonial settings. Postcolonialism emerged in the context of British and French colonialism and thus tends to relate to South Asia, Africa, the Anglophone and Francophone Caribbean, and the Middle East. By contrast, decoloniality came out of Latin American contexts, especially those of former Spanish and Portuguese colonies. Given that both movements pivot on challenging European colonialism and Eurocentrism, they are similar in their radical and transformation potentials and demands. For too long existing in separate silos, postcolonial and decolonial scholars are now engaging increasingly in productive conversations, as also exemplified by some of the chapters in this book.

The relationship between translation and colonisation is well established. Douglas Robinson, for example, placed colonialism at the heart of translation, noting that 'translation has always been an indispensable channel of imperial conquest and occupation' (1997, 10). Lawrence Venuti underlined how '[t]he colonization of the Americas, Asia, and Africa could not have occurred without interpreters, both native and colonial, nor without the translations of effective texts, religious, legal, educational' (2002, 158). Tejaswini Niranjana (1990, 1992) and Eric Cheyfitz (1991) uncovered how ethnographic translation has been a central vehicle for domination. Niranjana resonantly declared: 'Translation as a practice shapes, and takes shape within, the asymmetrical relations of power that operate under colonialism' (1990, 773). Along with Gauri Viswanathan (1989), she critically examined the supposedly civilising role of the English language in India. The British parliamentarian Thomas B. Macaulay had in 1835 made English language instruction and the training of translators in India central, revealing the link between translation, domination, and empire. He notoriously asseverated:

> We must at present do our best to form a class who may be *interpreters* between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals and in intellect. To that class we may leave it to *refine the vernacular dialects* of the country, to enrich those dialects with terms of science borrowed from the Western nomenclature, and to render them by degrees fit vehicles for conveying knowledge to the great mass of the population.
>
> (Macaulay, 1995/1835, 428–430; emphasis added)

Here Macaulay blends the literal act of translation or interpretation with the metaphor of moulding Indians into culturally transformed, English-speaking intermediaries. Fascinatingly, though, Rashmi Sadana (2012, 23) shows that in twenty-first century India, the Dalit activist Chandrabhan Prasad has been provocatively championing Macaulay's Anglicisation. Prasad views English as a neutral language for the scheduled castes because it does not carry the weight of brahminical oppression. Meanwhile, Cheyfitz uncovered some sixteenth- and seventeenth-century European translations of the New World, establishing yet again how translation has been a crucial instrument of colonisation. Additionally, Michael Cronin (1996) has highlighted how translation continued to be fraught in Ireland, long after the country achieved independence from the United Kingdom.

While the role of translation in decolonisation was being uncovered, the study of world literature itself took a 'translation turn', largely in the first decade or so of the twenty-first century. Whereas postcolonial literary studies centre around European languages and, to a lesser extent, the tongues of

countries previously ruled over by the British Empire, contemporary world literature scholarship scrutinises works in translation from any language, including non-European and non-colonised ones. For prominent scholars such as Pascale Casanova (2007/1999), David Damrosch (2003), and Franco Moretti (2005), world literature distinguishes itself from postcolonial studies in the lack of spatial or temporal restrictions imposed by the experience of colonialism. World literature encompasses a multitude of languages, yet it often appears to overlook colonialism's ongoing political fallout, thereby failing to fully heed the lessons elucidated by postcolonial theorists of the 1980s and 1990s (Pravinchandra and Chambers, 2018). Despite its foundations in the asymmetric field of translation, many world literature critics do not adequately emphasise the impact of (neo)colonialism.

What is more, as Nicholas Harrison argues in a 2014 article, Damrosch's vague claims in his influential book *What Is World Literature?* (2003) regarding the supposed gains in translation from which world literature benefits are grossly inflated. Himself a professor of French and postcolonial studies, Harrison stresses those losses that inevitably happen in translation but which are played down by Damrosch and his fellow travellers. Harrison also bewails the loss of linguistic competence and political edge he believes to have been caused by the translation turn. When he writes of world literature's 'vast menu of texts' (2014, 412), Harrison gestures towards depoliticised smorgasbords of books being served up shorn from their contexts in the cafeteria of global capital. David Bellos (2011) contrastingly posits that nothing is truly untranslatable for a skilled linguist. However, he equally recognises that a translation remains distinct from and falls short of the original. Finally, Emily Apter has emphasised the untranslatable and the losses incurred during translation in her seminal work *Against World Literature* (2013).

Our volume's authors take a cue from world literature scholars in scrutinising works in (and outside of) translation from both non-European and European languages. In terms of linguistic areas, there is significant diversity without a claim to complete coverage. Languages discussed include, but are not limited to, Arabic, Bengali, Chinese, Dari, English, Farsi, French, German, Gĩkũyũ, Gujarati, Hindi, Kiswahili, Pahari, Turkish, and Urdu. However, a certain invisibility of the work of translation – and of other languages as languages, tied up in particular worldviews – can be found in world literature criticism. This is something to which the present collection provides a corrective. Our book also foregrounds the impact of (neo)colonialism more prominently than world literature critics tend to do. World literature's neglect of politics is surprising, particularly given the movement's foundations in the unequal field of translation.

In this book, we are mindful of the slippage that frequently occurs around the notion of translation. Often the practical business of conveying one

language into another gets metaphorised (Guldin, 2016) as an analogy for reading (Harrison, 2014, 412), migration or diaspora (Rushdie, 1984/1983; Demir, 2022), or anthropology (in the form of 'cultural translation'; see Asad and Dixon, 1985; Asad, 1986; Bhabha, 1994, 226–229). Translation has even been mobilised as an image for interdisciplinarity (McCormack, 2005; Guldin, 2016, 110–114), such as the kind of work in which we are engaged. As is made clear in the chapters, we and our contributors are not opposed to translation being used as a metaphor, and we do not think that language can or ought to be policed. However, we do advocate an awareness and interrogation of the blurred lines between practical translation and the concept's figuration of other phenomena, for example, in the chapters offered by Gargi Binju and Peiyu Yang involving cultural translation (Asad, 1986).

It should not escape our notice that in the process of carrying a text across to another language, this text is sometimes transformed to the point of being almost unrecognisable. This might be seen as a creative process, or even as an art other than translation. Indeed, the term 'transcreation' gained purchase with the work of Brazilian translator and poet Haroldo de Campos (2007/1958) and later the publication of Indian critic P. Lal's study *Transcreation: Two Essays* (1972). Lal used the word to describe his process when conveying the *Mahabharata* and *Upanishads* into English. He not only translated the sacred texts but also reconstructed them using a simplified language, making them easily understandable for modern readers. Lal's reinterpretation of the term in a collection of seven essays (1996) sparked a renewed fascination with transcreation. So too did Pakistani author Qurratulain Hyder's use of the verb 'transcreate' to describe her decades-long translation and thorough edit of her own Urdu novel *Ag ka darya* (2003/1959) into the English volume *River of Fire* (1998); Else Ribeiro Pires Viera's discussion of Brazilian transcreation in Susan Bassnett's and Harish Trivedi's essay collection *Post-Colonial Translation* (1999, 95–113); and, most recently, Isabel Gomez's deployment of the term in *Cannibal Translation* (2023). De Campos's, Bassnett's and Trivedi's, and Gomez's ideas are discussed by Claire Chambers in her chapter for this book (for Lal and Hyder, see Chambers, 2015).

Much recent cultural and social theory has tried to come to terms with having forgotten about or played down the issue of colonialism. Our edited collection accordingly redirects the critical gaze onto uncovering whether and how translation has been, is, or can be a vehicle for decolonisation. In 'Translation, Community, Utopia', Venuti writes: 'translating is . . . utopian. The domestic inscription is made with the very intention to communicate the foreign text, and so it is filled with the anticipation that a community will be created around that text – although in translation' (2000, 485). We take this idea of community formation as a model. At

this twenty-first century decolonial or 'post-postcolonial' juncture (see Bandia in this volume), we therefore ask: can translation be a tool for resisting colonisation? Can 'a practice of translation that is speculative, provisional and interventionist' focus attention on difference and resist erasure (Niranjana, 1992, 173)? Could misconnections and mistranslations in the Spanish conversion of the Tagalogs in the Philippines be interpreted as resistance and decolonisation (Rafael, 1993)? What is the potential for a 'decolonized translation practice' (Batchelor, 2009)? Can translation be thought of as a 'contact zone' (Pratt, 2007) or, conversely, the contact zone be constructed as a place where translation can also aid decolonisation itself? To what extent might Antoine Berman's and Lawrence Venuti's (2000) elaborations of foreignisation be considered a strategy of decolonisation? How does Abdelkébir Khatibi's notion of a 'professional stranger' (1990/1983), travelling through and navigating multiple worldviews, languages, and civilisations, help to challenge ethnocentrism and nationalism (Rice, 2020)? What examples of translation as a resistance tool against colonisation are there, in a similar vein to the strategies developed by Sarah Winnemucca (Sorisio, 2012)? For example, can we cherish certain moments of 'not understanding' as opening up a 'space for learning' (White, 1995) but some others as a form of decolonial resistance? What are the links between translation and resistance in postcolonial times (Bandia, 2008)? Can feminist translational strategies of footnoting, supplementing, prefacing and hijacking (von Flotow, 1991; Simon, 1996), or queering translation (Basile, 2017) be used to understand and expand decolonial translation? Can a focus on decolonisation and South-to-South solidarities itself avoid falling into the trap of 'reifying the power of the dominator to a degree that the agency of non-Western cultures is reduced to a single possibility [of] resistance' (Liu, 1995, xv; xvi)? Can South–South translations, and the refusal to go via the Global North, be construed as a form of decolonisation? Even though the book does not have full answers to all these questions, the various chapters explore them from multiple angles while mapping routes towards new understandings.

Previous scholars paid attention to translation and language in order to reveal hierarchies and problems to do with communication, incommensurability, and cultural interaction arising from European expansion and colonisation. In this edited collection, we turn the tables and reveal if and how translation has been a vehicle or even an instigator of decolonisation, as in the instigation of South-to-South conversations. Translation often makes the familiar 'strange' and renders the strange 'familiar'. Its role in decolonising therefore warrants close scrutiny. In the last decade, particularly since the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement following the murder of George Floyd by a serving police officer in 2020, there has been increased interest and focus on decolonising. More specifically, there has been a decolonial

turn in many sections of the social sciences and humanities, challenging the epistemic violence of modernity and disciplines of the Global North. Edward Said (1978), Oyèrónké Oyěwùmí (1997), Ramón Grosfoguel (2006), Gurminder Bhambra (2007), Walter Mignolo (2007), María Lugones (2008), Homi Bhabha (1994), and many others had already reconceptualised existing understandings of modernity, coloniality, and power in previous decades. They provided renewed understandings of these subjects which reframed and shifted how we understand them today, taking analysis in postcolonialism and decoloniality further.

In this book, we thus start from the premise that translation can be and has been productively disruptive, and proceed to unfurl this in relation to challenges to coloniality. By drawing from theories of postcolonialism and decoloniality as well as translation theory, but also considering specific case studies, the book reveals and scrutinises new relationships between decolonisation and translation. Its chapters deal with these issues theoretically, conceptually, and even practically (see, for example, Maureen Freely's chapter from the perspective of a prominent translator). We have sought to commission work which interrogates how translation, including cultural translation, has been able to or has the potential to counter colonial imaginaries, glory, institutions, or practices. We have also solicited chapters which conceptually unpack the relationship between translation, decolonisation, and postcoloniality (for example, those by Paul F. Bandia, Kathryn Batchelor, and Claire Chambers). A unique marker of the book is its attempt to decolonise translation studies further. In other words, the collection connects translation studies with the recent decolonial turn in the social sciences and humanities while also bringing translation to studies of decolonisation itself in the way, for example, Esperança Bielsa (2023) has brought translation to sociology. The volume exposes how translation has opposed colonial imaginaries, institutions, and practices in the past as well as the present.

Another distinctive feature of the book is its interdisciplinarity. Piotr Blumczynski (2016) and Edwin Gentzler (2017) had already pointed in this direction, but as monographs, their works understandably could not incorporate the range of disciplinary perspectives and languages this collection can encompass. We, the editors, are academics from the disciplines of sociology (Demir) and literature (Chambers). We have carried out (inter)disciplinary research into decolonisation as well as translation. The present book has allowed us to centre attention on two interdisciplinary fields, namely translation studies and decolonial and postcolonial studies, to think of ways they can be made to speak to one another. Our contributors include literary critics, cultural theorists, migration scholars, social and political theorists, sociologists, anthropologists, experts in various languages, translation practitioners, and others. This has further gains, as the chapters achieve the

larger aim through the medium, approaches, and tools of various other disciplines and fields, such as literature, international relations, cultural studies, human rights studies, migration and diaspora studies, women's and sexuality studies, and sociology. As such, the book opens various dialogues and conversations across many academic fields and disciplines.

Despite the wealth of literature, explored previously, that evaluates the coercive origins and broader impact of translation, little of this work reveals the overlaps and intersections between and across the usually discrete and compartmentalised arenas of literary or cultural studies analysis and sociologically informed academic discourse. Furthermore, some valuable academic work which tackles translation apropos of questions of race and (neo)colonialism has nonetheless tended to be compartmentalised within one or other of these broad and at times varied disciplinary bases (for some other examples, see Cronin, 2003, 2006; Polezzi, 2012; Bubb, 2022). The contributions in this book offer an original and necessary disruption by bringing together these highly intersecting spheres of interest, the literary and the sociological. This is predominantly due to the skillsets of the two editors – one a sociologist who has 'raided' translation studies in her work (Demir, 2022) and the other a sociologically minded literary critic (Chambers, 2011; Phillips et al., 2021) – whose respective work has already made inroads into developing fused and hybrid texts. The interdisciplinary space afforded by this book is reflected not only in its editors being situated in different disciplines, with different languages (Turkish for Demir, and Hindi and Urdu for Chambers) as well as English, but also via the polyvocal contributors from various disciplines and the Global North and Global South.

In the chapters to come, readers of this book will be taken on what we hope is a wide-ranging and educational journey, exploring the complexity of translation and decolonisation around the world and at different historical moments. A variety of locations are embraced, including Pakistan, India, Afghanistan, Germany, Palestine, China, and East Africa, while historical periods encompass the high noon of the British Empire, the cold war, and the present day. The contributions provide conceptual, general and practical frameworks (chapters by Paul F. Bandia, Kathryn Batchelor, Claire Chambers, Maureen Freely, Abdelmajid Hannoum, Tejaswini Niranjana, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o). Other chapters discuss the dynamics of translation in relation to war, migration, and refugees (chapters by Encarnación Gutiérrez Rodríguez and Sara de Jong). Some others rethink South–South conversations and cultural translations as forms of decolonising translation (Haider Shahbaz, Peiyu Yang, and Gargi Binju).

The contributions not only open up conceptual, philosophical, and general pathways for understanding the relationship between decoloniality,

postcoloniality, and translation but also for rethinking the role of the English language. Spivak and Ngũgĩ engage in critical conversations about the role of English, feeding off similar concerns. Spivak argues that translators must try to understand the original writer's assumptions, especially in the context of English's global dominance, highlighting the complexity of translating non-European languages. Her chapter emphasises the need for translators to surrender themselves to the host language's worldview, as she calls translation 'the most intimate act of reading' (16). In his chapter, Ngũgĩ reflects on his transition from English to Gĩkũyũ, advocating for the revitalisation of African languages and the crucialness of language policies and investment in African-language literature. He emphasises the role of academics and writers in championing African languages for cultural and intellectual enrichment, foreseeing a positive impact on Africa and the world. Offering different solutions – an abstract, inward relationship between the translator and their acquired language for Spivak and a practical one of finances and infrastructure for Ngũgĩ – these two giants of postcolonial and decolonial literature nonetheless take a similar line on the need to persevere with translation despite its colonial inheritances.

Batchelor's offering, on the other hand, unpicks the frictions and affinities between decolonial and postcolonial scholarship on translation, critically examining attempts to brand decoloniality as completely distinct from postcoloniality. Batchelor not only challenges the claim regarding the radical break of decolonial translation practices but, in our view, decolonises such claims and perspectives via close readings of postcolonial theorists' work on translation. Chambers's chapter analyses two contemporary novels which advance decolonising interpretations of language, translation, and power. This chapter's contribution lies in demonstrating how the 'forked tongue' of translation can be both a tool for exploitation and a path to decolonisation. Bandia also expands the borders of decolonial translation though a discussion of multilingualism as a decolonial practice and its overlaps with translation, plotting an avenue for repaired translation as a form of decolonising. Bandia's notion of reparative translation is informed by African oral traditions, yet also illustrated through an engagement with postcolonial migrant literature, its artistry and aesthetic forms of resistance.

Niranjana's contribution to this volume takes a further step and genders translation. In her chapter, Niranjana discusses the expansion of translation studies in the 1990s, emphasising the need to integrate feminist perspectives and recognise the political dimensions of translation, particularly in the context of culture and gender in India. She argues that incorporating the concept of translation into this discourse sheds light on the evolving landscape of feminism in the region. Through a discussion of the relationship between culture and modernity in the colonial and postcolonial context, her chapter

unpacks the positioning of women in discussions about culture in the Indian subcontinent and Asia more broadly. In so doing, she adds an intersectional feminist perspective to the decolonisation of translation. Hannoum introduces yet another perspective on translation and decolonisation, this time focusing on prefaces of translations and the translation ideology therein. By juxtaposing the prefaces of the translated work of Frantz Fanon, Hannoum reveals how translation prefaces at times reinforce, and at times challenge, inherent translation ideologies. Freely, on the other hand, draws from her own experience of translating Turkish into English (for example, the fiction of Orhan Pamuk) and therefore the difficulties of translating literature from Turkey. Turkey was of course the modern successor of an (Ottoman) empire, yet one which was also embroiled in, and at the mercy of, European empires and colonialisms.

Chapters by Gutiérrez Rodríguez and De Jong examine the dynamics of translation and decolonisation in the context of current migration regimes, wars, and asylum and refugee controls. Through a focus on the voices and discourses of migrant and refugee protests in Germany since the 1990s, Gutiérrez Rodríguez discusses the translatability and untranslatability of human rights, with a particular focus on social justice and refugees. The chapter challenges human rights discourses through vernacular translation and decolonial interpretations, and thus via through and *beyond* human rights. Though her analysis of in-depth interview data with male Afghan interpreters, De Jong identifies three specific decolonial translational challenges and interactions in the US-led NATO war in Afghanistan. She analyses how Afghan interpreters who worked for international forces during the military intervention in Afghanistan were not just marked by the logics and violence of coloniality but also confronted and undermined neo-colonial logics and relationships.

The contributions to this book also decolonise translation by examining examples and cases of South-to-South translation, as discussed by Haidar Shahbaz, Peiyu Yang, and Gargi Binju. Through literary analysis, oral history, and archival research, Shahbaz examines *Āwāz* magazine, which resisted dictatorship in Pakistan while promoting solidarity across the 'Third World'. The magazine achieved its aims through anti-imperialist and anti-colonial conversations and solidarities between African and Asian translators, editors, and writers, contributing to the formation of a radical Afro-Asian internationalist and anti-colonial imagination during the cold war. Yang's work embarks on a similar trajectory, both temporally and spatially. She evaluates a travel book by Ghassan Kanafani, the renowned Palestinian author of resistance literature, about his trip to the People's Republic of China in 1965. The chapter provides close textual analysis of Kanafani's work . . . *Then Rose Asia*, arguing that despite the book's solidarity-building drive and ambition, the cultural translation

within it is replete with gendered Orientalist tropes and idealised depictions of Maoism. As such, the chapter paints a complex picture of the use of cultural translation in anti-colonial resistance and solidarity building, as well as its complicity in reproducing colonial tropes. Binju casts her critical eye on cultural translations of the South Asian diaspora in East Africa though an examination of two novels by M. G. Vassanji, *The Gunny Sack* and *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall*. Vassanji tells stories of South Asians in East Africa who find themselves caught between India/Pakistan, Africa, and British colonialism. Through deploying in-betweenness when analysing these two novels, Binju positions the concept not as a space of celebratory hybridity and cultural mixing, but as a precarious place caught between the coloniser/colonised binary.

The chapters to unfold in this volume thus not only discuss whether and how translation can be a source for decolonisation but also give countless examples of how translation studies itself can make key the idea of decolonisation for understanding translation. As such, we hope the book galvanises many other novel explorations of the relationship between translation and decolonisation.

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1

TRANSLATING INTO ENGLISH[1]

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak

I'd like to begin with what should be an obvious point. That the translator should make an attempt to grasp the writer's presuppositions. Translation is not just the stringing together of the most accurate synonyms by the most proximate syntax. Kant's 'Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason' (1996/1793) is written with the presupposition that mere (rather than pure) reason is a programmed structure, with in-built possibilities of misfiring, and nothing but calculation as a way of setting right. Since the eighteenth century, English translators, not resonating with Kant's philosophical presuppositions, have psychologised every noun, making Kant sound like a rational-choice, bourgeois Christian gentleman.[2] Kant's insight could have taken on board today's major problem: can there be a secularism without an intuition of the transcendental, of something that is inscrutable because it cannot be accessed by mere reasoning? Kant's project, to protect the calculus of reason by way of the transcendental as one parergon among four, was counterintuitive to his English translator.[3]

I will add three more examples here to show the generality of the problem. In these, the lack of translators' sympathy stalled a possible use for each text, a use that relates to the limits of rational choice. This brings the examples into my chief concern: the responsibility of the translator into English. I hope some readers will care to follow the trajectory suggested by each.

When Marx wrote about the commensurability of all things, that it was 'contentless and simple' (*inhaltslos und einfach*), he was speaking as a materialist speaks of form (Marx, 1977/1867, 90). Not as *form*, but as a thing without content. Generations of empiricist English translators have missed the point, not resonating with Marx's philosophical presuppositions, translated *inhaltslos* as 'slight in content', and thus made nonsense out of the entire discussion

DOI: 10.4324/9781003351986-2

of value. Marx's insight could have taken on board today's transformation of all things into data–telecommunication rendering information indistinguishable from capital. Marx's presuppositions, to control the inevitability of intelligible formalism in a materialist interest, seemed counterintuitive to his English translators.

In his seminar on the gaze or glance, the eminent French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan presents the scopic or apparently objectivising sweeping glance as something like a symptom. To show his students this, Lacan cannot use proof. It is the very production of proof in the patient that Lacan is opening up. He therefore uses the interesting coinage *apologue* – apology, excuse, but also something that is just a little off the side of the Logos. 'I will tell you a little apologue', he says (*Je vais vous raconter une petite apologue*) (Lacan, 1978, 95). The naturalising translator, thinking Lacan is just talking about people looking, translates this important sentence as 'I will tell you a little story'.

When the French historian Michel Foucault described the ground floor of power as set up with 'irreducible over-againsts' (*irréductible vis à vis*), he was trying to avoid transcendentalising the empirical (Foucault, 1980, 96). Humanist English translators, unable to resonate with Foucault's philosophical presuppositions, have translated 'vis-a-vis' as 'opposite', given content to a nonformalist intuition of form, and turned the argument into the micropolitics of power, understood as ordinary language.

Grasping the writer's presuppositions as they inform his or her use of language, as they develop into a kind of singular code, is what Jacques Derrida, the French philosopher who has taught me a great deal, calls entering the protocols of a text – not the general laws of the language, but the laws specific to this text. And this is why it is my sense that translation is the most intimate act of reading.

I begin this way because I am a translator *into* English, not just from specific languages. Because of the growing power of English as a global lingua franca, the responsibility of the translator into English is increasingly complicated. And, although I chose my four opening examples in order to avoid cultural nationalism, it is of course true that the responsibility becomes altogether more grave when the original is not written in one of the languages of northwestern Europe.

For a variety of reasons, the market for quick translations from such languages is steadily on the rise. Since the mid-1970s, it has been enhanced by a spurious and hyperbolic admiration not unrelated to the growing strength of the so-called international civil society.[4] In the 1970s, extra-state collective action in Europe, Latin America, Asia, and Africa concerned itself with issues such as health, the environment, literacy, and the like. Although their relationship with the nation-state was conflictual, there was still a relationship. Gradually, with the advance of capitalist globalisation, this emergent force

was appropriated into the dominant. These earlier extra-state collectivities, which were basically nongovernmental entities, often with international solidarity, were now used to undermine the constitutionality (however precarious or utopian) of the state. Powerful international NGOs now control these extra-state circuits globally. Indigenous NGOs typically have a large component of foreign aid. This self-styled international civil society (since it is extra-state) has a large cultural component, especially directed towards gender issues. It is here that the demand for translation – especially literary translation, a quick way to know a culture – has been on the rise. At this point, we translators into English should operate with great caution and humility.

Yet the opposite is often the case. Meenakshi Mukherjee, the well-known feminist Bengali scholar of English literature, has spoken to me of a person – she did not mention the name – who has recently turned their hand to translating from the Bengali. Upon repeated questioning about their proficiency in Bengali, this would-be translator has given the same answer: '*bangla porte jani*' (I can read Bengali). We all know of such cases.

It is time now to mention the other obvious point: the translator must not only make an attempt to grasp the presuppositions of an author but also, and of course, inhabit, even if on loan, the many mansions, and many levels of the host language. *Bangla porte jani* is only to have gained entry into the outer room, right by the front gate.

I am at the moment engaged in translating Mahasweta Devi's novel *Chotti Munda ebong tar tir*, published in 1980.[5] In the last paragraph that I translated, I made a choice of level when I came across the phrase *mohajoner kachhe hat pa bandha* – 'Arms and legs in hock to the moneylender', I wrote. 'In hock' is more in the global lingua franca than in the English that is one of the Indian languages. Sujit Mukherjee, the brilliant Indian translator from Bengali into English, and I, had a running conversation about such choices. But 'mortgaged' would have been, in my judgement, an error of level, and would have missed the pun, 'being tied up or trussed', present in the original. Not that 'in hock' catches the pun. But 'hock' is sufficiently confusing in its etymology to carry the promise of nuances. The translator must play such games.

Lower down in the paragraph, I'm less satisfied with my treatment of the phrase *hoker kotha bollo na Chotti?* as 'Didn't Chotti speak of 'rights'?' *Hok*, in Bengali, a *tatshomo* or identical loan from the Arabic *al haq*, is not rights alone but a peculiar mix of rights and responsibilities that goes beyond the individual. Anyone who has read the opening of Mahasweta's novel knows that the text carries this presupposition. I have failed in this detail. Translation is as much a problem as a solution. I hope the book will be taught by someone who has enough sense of the language to mark this unavoidable failure.[6]

This for me is an important task of translation, especially from languages that are dying, some fast, some slow, for want of attention. In our particular

circumstances, we translators from the languages of the Global South should prepare our texts as metropolitan teaching texts because that, for better or for worse, is their destiny. Of course, this would make us unpopular, because the implicit assumption is all that 'Third World' texts need is a glossary. I myself prepare my translations in the distant and unlikely hope that my texts will fall into the hands of a teacher who knows Bengali well enough to love it, so that the students will know that the best way to read this text is to push through to the original. Of course, not everyone will learn the language, but one might, or two! And the problem will be felt. I should add here that I have the same feeling for Aristotle and classical Greek, Hrotswitha von Gandersheim and Latin, Dante and Italian – and, of course, Kant and Marx and German, Lacan and Foucault and French. It is just that these latter texts have plenty of teaching editions and the languages are not ignored. I received a contemptuous notice, I think, if memory serves, from *Kirkus Reviews*, some years ago, for preparing a volume of fiction by Mahasweta Devi with a preface and an afterword (Devi, 1995). Literature and philosophy do, of course, belong to different slots on a publisher's list, but I contrast this with the abundant praise I have received over the last twenty-seven years all over the world for providing just that apparatus for a volume of philosophical criticism by Jacques Derrida (1976).

In this spirit I will turn now to *Ashomoyer Noteboi* (Untimely Notebook) by Farhad Mazhar, the activist–poet from Bangladesh.[7] *Ashomoy* is an interesting word. *Duhshomoy* would be 'bad times' of course. But Nietzsche's use of *Unzeitgemäße*, typically translated as 'untimely', as in *Untimely Meditations*, gave me a way out (Nietzsche, 1983). And a notebook is a place where meditations are jotted down.

Mazhar thinks of himself as 'untimely' quite as Nietzsche does, indeed quite as Nietzsche believes genuine cultural figures must be: 'Virtue . . . always swims against the tide of history, whether by combating its passions as the most proximate stupid factuality of its existence or by dedicating itself to being honorable while the lie spins its glittering web around it'.[8] He offers no alternatives: 'The untimely thinker, which is how Nietzsche viewed himself, does not work directly towards the establishment of another culture, in which his arguments might become 'timely', rather, he is working 'against my age, and thereby influencing my age, and hopefully for the benefit of a future age' (Vattimo, 2002, 31–32).

As Foucault suggests in 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History':

> If genealogy in its turn poses the question of the land that saw our birth, of the language that we speak, or of the laws that govern us, it is to make visible the heterogeneous systems which, under the mask of our 'we', forbids us all identity . . . [Another] use of history . . . uncovers the violence of a position taken: taken against ignorant happiness, against the vigorous

> illusions by which humanity protects itself, taken in favour of all that is dangerous in research and disturbing in discoveries.
>
> (Foucault, 1977, 162–163; translation modified)

In pursuit of heterogeneity, Mazhar goes clear out of culture into nature, undertaking impossible translations from the animal world in a recognizably Nietzschean mode. We recall that this is precisely where Derrida locates Nietzsche as philosopher of life (Derrida, 1989, 54; 57n.3):

> Now then notebook, will you get the Philip's
> Prize this time?
> Try hard, try hard, by Allah's grace.
> Caution
> I'm copying down how the grass crawls
> I'm copying down how the jaguar grabs
> I'm slipping, my foot's missed its hold
> I'm copying down the problems on the way
> along with the foot's heel
> Caution caution
> Earlier you had to fight standing
> on the other side of the barbed wire
> Now on both sides: Right and left, top and
> bottom, in water and on land . . .
> Go get your teeth fixed by the alligator
> From the snake a rubber spine
> Go suckle the breasts of the bat
> Hey my untimely notebook, the times are bad
> chum
> Must walk with eyes peeled on all sides my
> *friend*
> *Be careful!!*
> *Caution!!!*

In the previous stanza, he speaks of the woman Nurjahan who was stoned to death because she was supposed to have slept with someone other than her husband. I can commend Mazhar's feminism and work out his spiritual link with the anything-but-feminist Nietzsche but I cannot work out the words *murtad* and *dorra* in lines 2 and 3:

> Untimely notebook, I'm giving a fatwa,
> you're murtad
> I'll dorra you a hundred and one times
> you're shameless

I'll fix you in a hole and stone you to death
In front of the whole village
You to Chhatakchhara, to Kalikapur
Must go, this time to die
Seek out a torn sari or a pitcher
Shariat witness, Allah has bred girls
For the village elders and the world's rich men
Shariat witness, the task of imam and mollah
is to fulfill Allah's will
Go faith go money go reaction go progress go
Go Jamayate Islami go imperialism go Subal
go Sudam[9]
Go hand in hand twin brothers let's watch and
be delighted . . .

I am unable to access *murtad* and *dorra* because they are *tatshomo* words from Arabic. I add an explanation of this word and the companion word *tadbhabo* – words that were known to every Bengali schoolchild when I went to high school in the early 1950s. I am not a Bengalist, merely a translator in love with the language. What I am about to give you is a generalist's sense of things. *Tat* in these two words signifies 'that' or 'it', and refers to Sanskrit, one of the classical languages of India, claimed by the Hindu majority. They are descriptive of two different kinds of words. *Tadbhabo* means 'born of it'. *Tatshomo* means 'just like it'. I am using these two words by shifting the shifter *tat* – that or it – to refer to Arabic as an important loan-source.

Through the centuries of the Mughal empire in India (1526–1857) and the corresponding Nawabate in Bengal, Bengali was enriched by many Arabic and especially Persian loan-words. Of course Bengali is derived from Sanskrit, which was by then 'dead', so the relationship is altogether different. But learned and worldly Bengali gentlemen were proficient in Arabic, and especially Persian – the languages of the court and the law. The important entry of the British into India was by way of Bengal. It is at least the generalist's assumption that the British played the Bengali Hindus with promises of liberation from the Muslim empire. William Jones's discovery that Sanskrit, Greek, and Latin were related languages even gave the Hindus and the English a common claim to Aryanism, a claim to intertranslatability, as it were.[10] And, from the end of the eighteenth century, the fashioners of the new Bengali prose purged the language of the Arabic–Persian content until, in the great blank verse poetry of Michael Madhusudan Dutt (1824–1873) and the *Bangadarshan* (1872–1876) magazine edited by the immensely influential novelist Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay (1838–1894), a grand and fully Sanskritised Bengali emerged. Its Arabic and Persian components became no more than local colour. This was the language that became the vehicle of

Bengali nationalism and subsequently of that brand of Indian nationalism that was expressed in Bengali. The medium was simplified, expanded, and diversified into the contemporary Bengali prose of India that is the refined edge of my mother tongue, which I learned in school, and which did not allow me to translate *murtad* and *dorra*.

A corresponding movement of purging the national language Hindi of its Arabic and Persian elements has been under way since independence in 1947. Such political dismemberments of language have become part of partition studies – as Serbian separates from Croatian, Czech from Slovak, and Cantonese is dismissed as a mere dialect of Han. The political production of internal translation requires a different type of analysis, which I will touch upon in my conclusion.

If the Arabic and Persian elements were purged out of Bengali, how do I encounter them as a translator today? I encounter them as part of a general movement in Bangladesh to restore these components. This is not to be confused with an Islamisation of the language, since there can be no question of transforming the Sanskrit base of Bengali. Indeed, Mazhar uses the Sanskrit-based vocabulary of Bengali with considerable flair. One may call this an attempt persistently to mend the breach of a partition that started – as I have indicated in my generalist tale – long before the named Partition of India in 1947. It is to restore a word-hoard that went underground.

What was created as East Pakistan in 1947 became independent as Bangladesh in 1971. Although there was an important political and military conflict that brought this about, it would not be incorrect to say that one strong factor of the mobilisation of what was to become Bangladesh was the issue of language.[11] And indeed the naming of the new nation as Bangladesh was to shrink an older cartography. Bangladesh (Banglaland) is the name of the entire land area whose people use Bangla, or Bengali; or Bangla is the name of the language of the entire people of the land or *desh* called Bangladesh. Before the Independence–Partition of 1947, this would have been the entire British province of Bengal, including today's Indian state of West Bengal and the modern nation-state of Bangladesh, whose geographical descriptive could be East Bengal – in Bengali, Paschim and Purbo Banga. Banga is the ancient name of a tract of land somewhat larger than the British province of Bengal. Thus the proper name of a premodern area and kingdom, displaced into the name of a Nawabate, translated into the colonial proper name of a province, expanded beyond a language area into the governmental abstraction of a presidency, is now modernised to designate not a language area but a bounded nation-state metonymically claiming the whole. This may be seen as the celebration of partition, however benign. Since 1947, the Indian state of West Bengal (or Paschim Banga) is the western part of a place that does not exist. Unlike those who propose solutions such as calling it merely Banga, so that it too can claim the whole, by a more ancient name, I propose no

nominative solution. Such a solution would finalise partition by making official the historically asymmetrical name of the whole for each geographically asymmetrical part. Even that could be undone, of course; for each part could say we are each the whole, in different ways. In the long run, it would not matter a great deal, for named places do not, strictly speaking, exist as such, since there are re-namings. If there is history, there is the re-naming of place. In this case as elsewhere, I am interested in the political mode of production of the collectively accepted existence of named places, whose 'other names' linger on as archaic or residual, emergent as local alternative or opposition, always ready to emerge.[12]

If the establishment of a place named Bangladesh in a certain sense endorses the partition of 1947, the language policy of the state, strangely enough, honours that other partition – the gradual banishment of the Arabic and Persian elements of the language that took place in the previous century – and thus paradoxically undoes the difference from West Bengal. The official language of the state of Bangladesh, over ninety percent Muslim, is as ferociously Sanskritised as anything to be found in Indian Bengali.

It is over against and all entwined in this tangle that the movement to restore the Arabic and Persian element of Bengali, away from its century-old ethnic cleansing, does its work. And it is because I grew up inside the tangle that, in spite of my love of Bengali, I could not translate *murtad* and *dorra* – though I could crack *ashomoyer* with Nietzsche.

I am only a translator, not a Bengalist. I can cite only two names in this movement: Akhtaruzzaman Ilias (1943–1997), the author of *Chilekothar Sepai* and the fantastic *Khoabnama* (Ilias, 1995, 1996; available in English as Ilias, 2021); and Farhad Mazhar, whose poem I was about to translate when I launched into this lengthy digression. It may be claimed that these writers do a double bluff on the Sanskritised linguistic nationalism of Bangladesh.[13]

At the meeting of the Sahitya Akadami I was immediately sidetracked into a translation of the word *huda* (about which more later) as an Arabic-origin Urdu word foreign to Bengali; and a learned etymologico-philosophical disquisition (a pale imitation of which I would be able to provide for Sanskrit-origin Bengali words) from a distinguished professor of Urdu from Kashmir. None of the Indian Bengalis could offer a translation.

Murtad and *dorra* can be translated as 'apostate' and 'whiplash'. *Huda* so overwhelmed the discussion that they remained un-Englished at the Akademi meeting. I have withheld this information for so long because, as I was moving through various European and Asian countries, revising, I kept wondering how I would get to find the English equivalents! A chance encounter, someone reading Bengali web in Bangkok airport – must be Bangladeshi! – provided them at last.

It is my belief that unless the palaeonymy of the language is felt in some rough historical or etymological way, the translator is unequal to her task.

Strangely enough, I got this lesson at St. John's Diocesan Girls' High School in Calcutta, from Miss Nilima Pyne, a young Christian woman (we thought her ancient, of course) who had learned Sanskrit with heart and soul. She had quoted at us, when I was no more than eleven or twelve, that famous pair of Sanskrit tags, both meaning 'there's a dry branch in the way'. See if you can sense the complete dissonance in the two sets of sounds; be sure to mark the greater length of the vowels in the second example. I have not followed accepted phonetic transliteration, but given the closest Englishing of the Sanskrit sounds:

a shushkam kashtham tishthatyagrey
b neerasa taruvara poorata bhaati

Can you sense the completely different ring of the two sentences? If you don't have a sense of Sanskrit, which is rather different from 'knowing' Sanskrit, you cannot, of course. Sound and sense play together to show that translation is not merely transfer of sense, for the two lines 'mean the same thing'. Sanskrit is not just a moment in Benveniste (1973).

This was not a lesson in translation. But it was such instruction that allowed us to understand, three or four years later, Shakespeare's play with 'the same meaning', once in Latinate and once in 'Anglo-Saxon' English, metaphorising enormity in the enormousness of the encompassing ocean:

> This my hand will rather
> The multitudinous seas incarnadine,
> Making the green one red.

We transfer content because we must, knowing it cannot be done, in translation as in all communication, yet differently. We transpose level and texture of language, because we must, knowing that idiom does not go over. It is this double bind that the best and most scrupulous translation hints at, by chance, perhaps. *Mimesis* hits *poiesis* by *tuchè* (Aristotle, 1995, 29). Translators from the languages of the Global South into English have lost this striving. The loss is incalculable. Responsible translators from the languages of the Global South into English therefore often translate in the shadow of the imminent death of the host language as they know it, in which they are nurtured.

Translating these two words in Mazhar, I was also suggesting that the burden of history and palaeonymy are added to this double bind. Arrived here I often hear, not everybody can be so well prepared! Is there ever such a refusal of craftspersonly expertise for European-language translation? I suggest we pay no attention to such excuses and proceed to the next poem, where another kind of history is invoked.

This poem refers us not to Bengali in the history of the nation-state but in the internationality of Islam. As already mentioned, Bengali is not of Arabic–Persian origin. It is not taken seriously as a language of Islam. During the war that established Bangladesh, soldiers of the then West Pakistan regularly taunted East Pakistani soldiers and civilians as not 'real' Muslims, no more than the force-converted dregs of Hinduism. (It may be worth mentioning here that Assia Djebar is most unusual in acknowledging Bengali among the non-Arabic Islamic languages: 'Arabic sounds – Iranian, Afghan, Berber, or Bengali' (Djebar, 1992).)

In this frame, Mazhar addresses Allah, as follows:

BANGLA IS NOT YOURS

You've built the Bangla language with the crown of
my head and the roof of my mouth
My epiglottis plays with the 'ah' and the long 'ee'
Breath by breath I test the 'om' and my chest's
beat
Heartstrings ring in the enchanted expanse of the
con-sonant
Oh I like it so, lord, I like the Bangla language so
much
I lick it clean, greedy, as if paradise fruit.
Are you envious? For in this tongue you never
Proclaimed yourself! Yet, all day I keep at it
Hammer and tongs so Queen Bangla in her own
Light and power stays ahead of each and all, my dearest lord.

Some ask today, So, Bangla, are you divine as well?
You too primordial? Allah's alphabet?

I'm glad Bangla's not yours, for if it were –
Her glory'd raise your price, for no reason at all.

Let us look at the last line. *Dānt* is one of those particularly untranslatable idiomatic words: airs and graces, swelled head, hype – you see the choice I've made: 'raise your price'. What is interesting is that this word has been coupled with *behuda*, another Arabic *tatshomo* word that I have translated 'unreasonably'. Let me first say that there is a common Sanskrit-origin word – *ajotha* (Sanskrit *ayathā*) – that would fit snugly here. *Behuda* points at itself, incomprehensible to 'the common reader'. I believe now that the word is in general use in Bangladesh. As I have already mentioned, I received a lecture on the Arabic word *huda* from my learned colleague from Kashmir. I could best grasp his meaning by turning it into the English familiar.

'Reason' in 'for no reason at all' is an ordinary language word. Yet 'reason' is also a word of great philosophical weight. *Huda* has a comparable range. What reason is being invoked here to claim a language connected to Revelation by imagination rather than letter? This is a different argument from the right to worship in the vernacular, where, incidentally, content transfer must be taken for granted. I go everywhere in search of the 'secular'. I will come back to this later. Here is a hint that expanding religion beyond mere reason may bring with it a question of translating rather than recording the transcendental.

Attempting to make the reader walk with the translator translating the poet translating his language through the history of nation-states and of internationality towards the transcendental, I will cite three poems here with brief introductions.

First, 'Lady Shalikh'.

The *shalikh* is a household bird, with no claim to beauty or musical skill. Mazhar is invoking the simplicity of the malnourished rural Bangladeshi woman, not the famed beauties of Bengal. Mazhar is a feminist poet. (I cannot unpack this difficult sentence here.) What does it mean to make the common woman cry out to Allah, in desperate humility, as the poet had, in pride of language?

In the garden of paradise a body-brown Shalikh
Calls. O my life, did you hear on paradise branch
Our kindhearted Shalikh calls with life and soul
Calling her own words at Allah's Durbar.

Can you hear, can you see, our Lord,
Holding the knee of her yellow gam straight
On gandam branch
Hacking her throat with her humble beak in weak
Abject low tones our Begum Shalikh calls?

What have we asked, dear Lord, our hopes are
small

Let our life's bird reside in paradise
Even if a dark-skinned girl, snub-nosed,
bandy-legged

Eyes sunk with body's work, yet in Bengal
A well-loved daughter, without her paradise
lost –

Bird call, call with life and soul, even Allah's
heart does melt.

The next poem refers to Rabindranath Tagore, who has already been mentioned as a master fashioner of modern, ethnically cleansed Bengali, a language that slides easily into English. Mazhar cannot disclaim his pervasive influence, but . . .

The Tagore Kid

Our sir Rabi is a huge big poet, white folks
Gave him the Nobel Prize to vet his literary might
Just right. His dad and gramps
Ran after the Brits and gathered in the loot
Became landowners by own claim
But family faults ne'er stopped
His verse – he's now the whole world's poet.

I salaam him, welcome him heartfelt.
Yet my soul, dear lord, is not inclined
To him. Rabindra had faults. His pen
Remembered many a lucky sage, saint, renouncer, and great man,
But never in wildest dream did the name of
Prophet Muhammad come in shape or hint
To his pen's point, so I can never forgive.

But dear lord of grace, you please forgive that boy, from Tagore clan.

In the last poem that I will cite, the poet addresses a figure within the Hindu tradition who was open to all others. Sri Rama Krishna Paramahansa (1836–1886) as he was known, was also a poet of the transcendental, although his medium was not literary verbality. He was not an intellectual and therefore could not alter the course of public language. But if *poiesis* is a making of the other that goes past *mimesis*, Rama Krishna must be called a poet in the general sense. Islam took its place among his imaginings and his iterations of the self. Because these moves acknowledged the irreducibility of the imperative to translate rather than its denial for the sake of identity, here Mazhar responds as part of that which is translated, not an 'original', but an other. Here translation surprises the poet as no displacement at all, perhaps; the mode is not declarative and introduces a picture of the poet dancing in the othered mode: 'Have I moved, then?'

In Rama Krishna's name Mazhar undertakes yet another translation or transfer into the transcendental, a messenger from the human mystic to God himself – the most easily recognisable name of the transcendental as such. And yet it is a translation: the poet articulates a plea for polytheist worship (a hibiscus for Kali) to achieve felicity in Allah's acceptance. He daringly offers to transport the Hindu hibiscus to the austere Allah of Islam. In the present of the poem, the transfer is forever performed.

Sri Ram Paramhansa

Have you seen the red hibiscus? You told that flower
to bloom, in Bengal
So it does hang and bloom
Blood red – *haemoglobin* of blood
In petals perhaps, it glows in wood and plot.

I a hibiscus flower in your honour my lord
Will give into the hands of th' blessed one,
Sri Rama Krishna Paramhansadeb.
He'll give his little chuckle, gap-tooth glowing in
laugh
And say 'O my Sheikh's Boy, here you are, you've come?'

Have I moved, then? Nope, I didn't move
If going, I go the same way everywhere.
Entranced the lord of love dances in state
The sheikh boy dances equal, loving this lord.

By way of Kali when Paramhansa sends
Hibiscus to you lord, accept with love.

Ground-level counter-theological Islam has managed such exchanges, perhaps not so spectacularly, wherever Islam has flourished. Today, when the great tradition of Islamic secularism is tarnished, it seems particularly important to allow poetry such as this to launch us on an imaginative journey that can be risked if reader and translator venture beyond the sanctioned ignorance that guards translation from the languages of the Global South into English. The literature of Bangladesh does not appear prominently on the roster. Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain's *Sultana's Dream* and *The Secluded Ones* are resuscitated from time to time in an indifferent translation from the Feminist Press (Hossain, 1988). Otherwise it is the fashioners of that other Bengali and their descendants who get Englished. It is of course different with development material, but that is another story.

As writers like Mazhar attempt to enter the detheologised 'religious', they question the premises of a superficial secularism. They are, in turn, incorrectly perceived as providing fuel for fundamentalists.

I started this essay with a reference to 'Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason'. I mentioned that a problem of translation does not allow us to see that in that text Kant considers with scrupulous honesty if secularism is possible without the possibility of thinking the transcendental. This task is absolutely crucial today. Those sanitised secularists who are hysterical at the mention of religion are quite out of touch with the world's peoples, and have buried their heads in the sand. Class-production has allowed them to rationalise and privatise the transcendental and they see this as the welcome

telos of everybody everywhere. There is no time here to connect this with the enforcement of rights, and the policing of education by the self-selected moral entrepreneurs of the self-styled international civil society – with no social contract and no democratic accountability. I can only assert here that the connection can and must be made. I hope I have been able at least to suggest that this state of the world has something to do with a failure of responsible translation, in the general and the narrow sense.

I have walked you through the hybridity of a single language. I want now to make a comment on the notion of hybridity that is the migrant's wish-fulfilment: irreducible cultural translation in any claim to identity. I wish translation could be so irreducibly taken for granted. The impossibility of translation is what puts its necessity in a double bind. It is an active site of conflict, not an irreducible guarantee. If we are thinking definitions, I should suggest the thinking of trace rather than of achieved translation: trace of the other, trace of history, even cultural traces – although heaven knows, culture continues to be a screen for ignoring discussions of class. If translation is a necessary impossibility, the thought of a trace looks like the possibility of an anterior presence, without guarantees. It is not a sign but a mark and therefore cannot signify an 'original', as a translation presumably can, especially when assumed as definitively irreducible. I contrast a comfortable notion of a permissive hybridity to the thought of the trace because the former is associated, sometimes precisely by the assurance of cultural translation, with the sanitised secularism of a global enforcement politics. This permissive hybridity can also foster an unexamined culturalism that can indeed give support to fundamentalisms here and there. That bit of the migrant population that faces a repressive state as well as dominant racism becomes a confused metonym for this other, separate global face of hybridity as translation. If the European context brought us to the sense of problems in the global public sphere, the context of Bangladesh brought us to the question of secularism. In my last section I come back to what has always been one my chief concerns: translation as reading. I examine here the problems of entering the protocols of a text, when the text seems to give way. I move to a singular example where the aporia of exemplarity – that the singular example loses singularity by entering the category 'example' – is cleanly resolved by the poet himself into no more than a reader's choice:

> This book of poems, focused on a girlfriend, and dealing only with a plea for love is indeed a diary . . . If you think only of me, this poetry is only a plea for love . . . Yet, because any one part is applicable to many situations connected to love, social theory, politics, science and many other topics, therefore one should be able to find a successful realisation of any kind of situation in the lives of any sort of reader, male or female.[14]

This book of poetry was first published in 1961 and then republished in 1962 under the title *Phire Esho Chaka* (Come Back, Wheel). The book was dedicated to Gayatri Chakravorty. (The Sanskrit *chakra* of the surname means wheel and is transformed into *chaka* is modern Bengali. A cunning translation.)[15] Chakravorty did not know the poet, although she had noticed the intensity of his gaze. She left Kolkata for the United States in 1961. She did not read the poems, although she knew of the book's fame, and that it was dedicated to her. Many of the poems lament her absence, his loneliness without a response. It is not clear that such lamentations, included in poetry, require 'response' in the ordinary way. Must the lost object not remain lost for the poems to retain their exact verbal contour? If reading is a species of translation, here was a rather singular double bind of translation, for a singular reader, with a specific proper name. Gayatri Chakravorty, not having read the poems, did not have to live this double bind.

In 2002, some forty years after the publication of the book, a facsimile edition of the manuscript was published. This book, in the poet's impeccable hand, is entitled *Gayatrike* (To Gayatri). I was shown a review of this text by a colleague, and a woman in the family bought me a copy. I have now read these brilliant poems. There is no question of response, other than what you read here.

A face and body, a figure, is a cipher, to be deciphered, read. The figure cannot read itself. The poet's uncanny eye has deciphered Gayatri Chakravorty, prefigured predicaments that she would like to think she averted in ways that he had counselled in those unread poems. At a certain point, the poet advises a different way of living:

> Not success outside,
> But a selfsame flowering as unstiff as the body's sleep
> Is what lovers want . . .
> Go on, try opening by yourself, like a shell would,
> Fail, yet that bit of sand, the little sand that finds its way just in,
> Will little by little be pearl, the proper success,
> Of movement.
> If you want a life as easy and all nature, like the sleeper's pose,
> Try breathing in the heart's interior fragrance.
>
> (8)

This reader would like to think that the prayer to be haunted by the ethical is kin to that advice. Benoy Majumdar was in and out of mental hospitals for forty years, and is now deceased. What is it for such a man to write: 'I will now be mad, at last by insane claws | Will prise out the angel's home address, the door' (30)? There are poems that delicately hint how 'madness' must be managed, and poems that ask: 'O time, where, at whose door shall I appear | With my armoured charms, my naked ways' (85)?

There is no question of response. The occasion of these poems has been translated into the transcendental. The facsimile edition ends with poems marked 'not to be included in the printed version'. I do not know if they are to be found in the printed versions. The last one of them is the only straightforward narrative poem in the sequence. The others are written 'according to the psychological process by which we dream (setting together scene after scene)' (Foreword). Indeed, Gayatri Chakravorty is called 'Dream-Girl' a number of times.

It is not possible to write about these poems briefly. There is spare praise of auto-eroticism, praise of the austere comforts of poetry, despair at loss of skill, a tremendous effort to imagine the smallest creatures, and the uncaringness of star and sky, to frame human frailty and loss, and a brilliantly heterogeneous collection of addressees. Sometimes the imagery is a rarefied dream lexicon: nail, cave, delta, rain. I hope they will not be translated soon. At last I would like to translate them.

There are repeated references to oneself as a letter lying on the wrong threshold, destined to err, a plea to be called if some 'social need' should arise:

> Come and pick me up like torn bits of a letter
> Put 'em together for curiosity's sake, read once and leave
> As if to disappear, leaving them like a slant look.
>
> (16)

There are reprimands to the frivolous girl, references to the future laughing at her sudden death (36), cryptic judgments such as the following, where nothing in the poems allows us to decide if Dream-Girl is among the exceptions or the rule: 'In very few women is there a supplement placed' (3). I have been unable to catch the specificity of *ramani* – one of a handful of common words for woman – that carries the charge of *ramana* – the joy of sex. I have also been unable to catch the pun in *krorpatra* (translated 'supplement') – literally 'lap-leaf'. What does the pun mean? This poet is uncharitable to women who merely breed and copulate.

It is this particular ambivalence in the poems that seems exciting for this translator to access, as she makes the mistake of thinking the named subject is she. Thus the ambivalence seems to offer a codicil to that bit in J. M. Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians* that she had so liked: how does the other see me? Identity's last secret. Coetzee describes the Magistrate describing his deciphering effort thus: 'So I continue to swoop and circle around the irreducible figure of the girl, casting one net of meaning after another over her . . . What does she see? The protecting wings of a guardian albatross or the black shape of a coward crow afraid to strike while its prey yet breathes?' (cited in Spivak, 2003b; Coetzee, 1980, 81).

I am the figure of the girl, the translator thinks, making that easy mistake, and this book offers what the poet sees as he casts his net. I come up both ways, albatross and crow. This is a lesson: to enter the protocols of a text one must other its characters.

In the last poem in the facsimile edition, in and out of the book, since it is not meant to be included in the printed version, Gayatri Chakravorty or 'my divine mistress' is translated into a declarative narrative of transcendental alterity. Response stops here, in the representation of response without end:

I've grasped it surely, life on earth is done;
I'm straight in heaven's kingdom, earth's body's shed.
These heavenly kingdoms are indeed our home, and we
Are just two spirits – Dream-Girl and I – this pair
Divinely live in heaven's kingdom now. I see,
That she's still that familiar youthful form,
And stands with a greeting smile upon her lips.
My divine mistress. I too have by desire kept a body,
Even in heaven – healthful, like Dream-Girl's,
As tall as she, no glasses, eyesight good,
I am to her taste, a good-looking young man.
Smiling she speaks up – You're done, you've come at last,
Now for the bliss of peace, fulfilment, thrill
In body and mind, in deep immeasurable kind,
Everything just so, as we would like it. Come.
Next, in a clasp so deep, and deeper still a kiss,
She promises that she will spend with me,
An eternity of shared conjugal life.

(85)

What is it to be an 'original' of a translation? This is what teaches me again the lesson of the trace. For a name is not a signifier but a mark, on the way to a trace. Benoy Majumdar makes Gayatri Chakravorty a hybrid, but not by the assurance of some irreducible cultural translation. The name as mark is caught between the place under erasure – crossed out but visible, on the handwritten title page – and its generalisation as 'my divine mistress': *amar ishwari*.[16]

On the flyleaf of this book I find notice of something that no critic has spoken of so far, a prose book, presumably, entitled *Ishwarir Swarachita Nibandha* – An Essay or Essays Composed by the Divine Mistress Herself. The book was out of print, I heard, but about to be printed again. How shall I be encountered by myself in that text, where I think the poet has attempted to access Gayatri Chakravorty's thinking? Here is an allegory of translation, turned inside out.

This task remains. And it remains to try that second way of reading, impersonal or diverse situations connected to social theory, politics, science. I am back where I began. I must get around the seduction of a text that seems to be addressed to myself, more than most texts, and enter the author's presuppositions, where my youthful proper name is obliterated in the concerns of general readers, equally welcome.[17] As I do so, I must of course remember that those presuppositions have a history and a geography, and that I am a translator into English.

Notes

1 This work was first presented as a keynote on January 17, 2001, at the Sahitya Akadami (India's National Academy of Letters), at a conference of translators. Since India has at least twenty-two official languages, the internal translators were not all knowledgeable about Derrida, Foucault, and Lacan, though Kant was known to some, and Marx, of course, to all. It was published in Berman and Wood (2005).

2 It is not that translators since the eighteenth century have not been aware that problems exist. The best known is the *Willkür–Wille* distinction, which the great translator T. K. Abbott translated as 'elective will' and 'will' respectively, thus coming close to the sense of the mere mechanical ability to select one thing rather than the other, preserved in the ordinary language associations of 'whim' or 'willfulness' attached to *Willkür*. This is why, as John R. Silber notes, Kant associates *Willkür* with heteronomy rather than autonomy. Silber seems to me to be correct in suggesting that '[t]he discovery and formulation of meanings for these terms was . . . one of Kant's foremost achievements in the *Religion* and in the *Metaphysic of Morals*. . . The evolving complexity of Kant's theory of the will is missed by the English reader unless they can know when Kant is using "*Wille*" and when he is using "*Willkür*"' (Silber, 1960, lxxxiv).

3 'Parergon' is Kant's word, describing a task that is outside the limits of the work undertaken (Kant, 1996/1793, 96 and passim). It is to be noticed that these parerga belong not only to the work of mere reason but that of pure reason as well. To discuss this detail is beyond the scope of this essay.

4 For an assessment of the limits of the international civil society, see Prasad (2000/1996, 3–28); for a somewhat unexamined encomium, see Bhabha (2002).

5 The translation appeared in 2002 (Devi, 2015/2002).

6 I have discussed the ambivalence of *al haq* in Spivak (2012/1999). Patrick Wolfe has an interesting comment about 'hock' and 'haq', an unwitting coupling on my part: 'I have nothing to base this on, but I can't help feeling that your text isn't the first place that these words have met up. In English, 'hock' has to do with ransoming – opposing groups (men and women, tenants and landlords, etc.) mock-kidnapped each other (tying up and trussing were involved) at Easter time and dues had to be paid for their return. A fair amount of ransoming went on during the Crusades. A practice associated with Saracens, hence the Arabic loan-word? Wild and woolly, I may well be suffering from a William Jones complex, but no doubt there's a philologist somewhere who'd know' (private communication).

7 Mazhar (1994, 42); translation mine. I have discussed this poem in another context in Spivak (1999, 362–363).

8 Nietzsche (1983, 106); translation modified. See also Nietzsche (1983, 22, 55, 60, 95, 146, 206, 251).

9 Friends of the Hindu god Krishna. Mazhar typically mingles the Hindu and Muslim elements of Bengali culture. More about this in the main body text.
10 I have discussed this at greater length in *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* (Spivak, 1999). Homi K. Bhabha misses this important and substantive religion/caste point when he quotes Alexander Duff as relating English and the Brahmins as proof of the merely formal irreducibility of hybridity (Bhabha, 1994, 33).
11 For discussions of the Bangladeshi language movement, see *Chinta* 22–23 (March 15, 2000), pp. 20–25.
12 I have discussed this in terms of the name 'Asia' in Spivak (2003a).
13 See Chakrabarty, 2021 for information about this discussion among Bangladeshi intellectuals.
14 Majumdar (2002), 'Foreword'. Subsequent references are to this edition and will be cited by page numbers in the main body text.
15 I have just read Jacques Derrida's *Voyous: deux essais sur la raison* (2003). His luminous and anguished words on the wheel ('La roue libre'; Derrida, 2003, 25–39) add greater poignancy to this singular narrative.
16 I am using Derridean language here. The editor of the facsimile edition thinks there is some connection between Benoy's perceptive glance and my 'spreading Derrida', as she puts it (Kankabati Dutta, 'À Propos'). Perhaps there's something there, but she has got her dates wrong. I started teaching Derrida (and Lacan, and Foucault) in the 1960s, not the 1980s.
17 I was in Kolkata for two nights recently, after this essay was submitted to the editors. It was the time of the justly celebrated Calcutta Kolkata Book Fair. There seemed to be a Benoy Majumdar revival. I acquired the slim *Complete Works*. I read this, written in 1992, thirty-one years after book's publication, in a letter: 'Gayatri Chakravorty was a student at Presidency College, and came First Class First in English in her B.A., in 1960 or 1961 A.D. [actually 1959], thinking that she alone would understand my poems the book *To Gayatri* was addressed to her, and therefore I called the book *To Gayatri*, and I wrote in the book what I had to say to her' (Majumdar, 1995, 3). But also this, from 1986, in an interview, twenty-five years later:

> I wanted to ask [says the interviewer] – Were you in love with Gayatri?
>
> Hey, no – I only knew her for two or three days – she was a famously beautiful student of English literature at Presidency College – then she went off somewhere – to America or some place, I'm not sure.
>
> Then why write poems about her?
>
> One must write about someone, after all. Can one write forever about mango trees, jackfruit trees, and tuberoses?
>
> (Majumdar, 1993/1986, 162)

Benoy had in fact never exchanged a word with Gayatri.

[Translator's note: the three items in the last sentence seem exotic in English. They are the Bengali equivalent of: 'apples and pears and red, red roses', let us say. I include these passages here in the interest of bibliographical detail. To think through their implications will take time.]

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2

DECOLONIAL AND POSTCOLONIAL PERSPECTIVES ON TRANSLATION

Compatibilities and Contradictions

Kathryn Batchelor

Since the early 2000s – more specifically since the publication of 'Globalization and the De-Colonial Option', a special issue of the Anglophone journal *Cultural Studies* in 2007 – the ideas of Latin American scholars such as Aníbal Quijano, Nelson Maldonado-Torres, María Lugones and Walter Mignolo have been widely cited in Anglophone academia. The basic premise of the 'de-colonial option' is that coloniality is the constitutive 'darker side' (Maldonado-Torres, 2007, 244) of modernity. When Europeans conquered the Americas, they established a 'colonial difference' (Mignolo, 2007a, 160) between themselves and those they conquered, categorising people along racialised lines into humans (European) and non-humans (the conquered). In the context of the grand narrative of modernity, in which mankind is progressing on a linear path towards a better future, 'the idea of progress always meant in modernity progress for a few . . . The Rights of Man do not apply equally to all' (Maldonado-Torres, 2007, 246). The colonial difference continues to shape our world, affecting the lines along which power and wealth are divided, as well as the types of human knowledge that are valued and the kinds of human lives that matter. Decolonial scholars seek to expose these patterns of coloniality and advocate for alternatives, stressing the importance of looking to the 'political and epistemic interventions and creations of the *damnés*' (2007, 262), a term taken from Frantz Fanon's (1961) seminal work, *Les damnés de la terre* (The Wretched of the Earth).

On various levels, there would appear to be significant overlap between decoloniality and postcolonial studies, the latter field having risen to prominence – and a degree of institutionalisation – in the 1980s and 1990s.[1] In terms of the theoretical genealogies constructed by postcolonial and decolonial scholars, for example, both strands of scholarship stress the centrality

DOI: 10.4324/9781003351986-3

of the writings of anti-colonial authors such as Aimé Césaire and – most prominently – Fanon. Other similarities include emphasis on the persistence of colonial power dynamics into the present day; contestation of dominant discourses, particularly Western conceptualisations of modernity and the non-European Other; and affirmation of the need for disruption to those discourses by the voices of the 'subaltern' (Spivak, 1988).

However, scholars including Kiran Asher (2013), Olimpia E. Rosenthal (2022) and Sara de Jong (2022) have observed that decoloniality and postcolonialism have historically had little to do with each other. As De Jong notes, 'Each field has created citational circles that rarely overlap, and the exchange between the two fields of scholarship is mostly marked by silence rather than confrontation' (2022, 89–90). Rosenthal (2022, 17) ascribes this state of affairs to the historical trajectory through which the decolonial option came to be formulated, suggesting that the 'antagonistic rejection of the emerging field of postcolonial studies' by Latin American scholars such as Mignolo in the 1990s 'conditioned a pattern of rejection' (Rosenthal, 2022, 21) that has endured to the present-day. In the contributions of decolonial scholars to the 2007 special issue mentioned previously and in other publications from the same era, this antagonism is readily apparent. Mignolo (2007a, 163) underscores the 'radical difference' between decoloniality and postcolonialism, presenting decoloniality as something which 'moves away and beyond the post-colonial' (Mignolo (2007b, 452). Ramón Grosfoguel (2006, 142) similarly calls for a 'move from postcolonial studies to decolonial studies' on the basis that postcolonial studies itself is in need of decolonising.

In these and later publications, decolonial scholars generally position their work as distinct from postcolonial scholarship without engaging with postcolonial scholarship in a rigorously intellectual manner.[2] Mignolo's (2014) discussion of postcolonialism in 'Further Thoughts on Decoloniality' is typical in this regard. Whilst stressing that 'postcoloniality' and 'decoloniality' belong to different 'universes of meaning' (Mignolo, 2014, 21), he limits specific discussion of the differences between them to issues of temporality, asserting:

> 'post' assumes linear time . . . Postcoloniality accordingly asserts an 'after' of coloniality. The prefix 'de' assumes, instead, many temporalities . . . Decolonial time means plurality of times entangled with a Western unilinear time which any 'post' reproduces in its imperiality.
>
> (Mignolo, 2014, 21; 49)

For this contrast to work, Mignolo ignores the many debates that have taken place within postcolonial studies about the meaning of the 'post-' prefix, along with the explicit rejection of its linear associations by many postcolonial theorists.[3] In a sense, Mignolo is thus attacking a straw man, marking

decoloniality out as more distinctive from postcolonialism than would be justified by a nuanced picture of postcolonialism.

As Gianmaria Colpani et al. (2022, 2) note, postcolonial scholars have rarely responded to challenges such as this that are levelled against them, or else have 'downplay[ed] them in favour of reconciliatory moves'. A much-cited paper by Gurminder K. Bhambra (2014) offers an example of the latter approach. Bhambra explores the potential alignments between postcolonial and decolonial scholars with the overall goal of bringing the two theoretical traditions together as 'connected sociologies' (2014, 115). In a recent special issue of *Postcolonial Studies*, however, a number of postcolonial researchers have begun to subject the relationship between decoloniality and postcolonialism to more intense critical scrutiny, interrogating the critical apparatus of decoloniality and the compatibilities and incompatibilities between the two fields of scholarship. In this chapter, I will follow a similar approach, attempting like De Jong (2022, 89) to 'stag[e] a conversation' (and not necessarily in a reconciliatory sense) between scholars from the two traditions by focusing on a specific topic which they both address. In De Jong's case, the focus is on human rights; mine will be on translation, an important concept for both groups of scholars.

The starting point for this artificially staged conversation is a book chapter jointly authored by Mignolo and Freya Schiwy in 2003. Entitled 'Double Translation: Transculturation and the Colonial Difference', the piece sets out to 'theoriz[e] translation across the colonial difference and as shaped by the coloniality of power' (Mignolo and Schiwy, 2003, 4). The aim, in other words, is to conceptualise translation within the theoretical framework of decoloniality. The paper opens with a sketch of translation history at a highly generalised level. In Mignolo and Schiwy's account, 'chroniclers and missionaries fixed an enduring model of translation in the sixteenth century', based on the use of translation for 'conversion' (2003, 6). Translation thus helped and continues to help in constructing the hierarchies on which coloniality was/is based, converting all alternative ways of being and living to a Christian and later neoliberal logic. In Mignolo and Schiwy's sketch, this model finds its first significant challenge at the end of the twentieth century in the form of the 'theoretical revolution' (2003, 12) initiated by the Zapatistas, an Indigenous revolutionary movement in Mexico. Mignolo and Schiwy argue that the Zapatistas 'drastically changed' (2003, 12) the model of translation–conversion, and 'contributed to a theory of translation/transculturation that is undoing the principles under which colonial differences were established all over the world' (2003, 12). They thus accord the Zapatistas a key role in the decoloniality movement, linking their translation approach to far-reaching and fundamental epistemological disruption. Mignolo and Schiwy repeatedly stress the originality of the Zapatistas' achievement, suggesting that the case study they are presenting 'unlock[s] a

four-hundred year history of repressive translation' (2003, 9),[4] and arguing that there is a 'fundamental difference' between the Zapatistas' translation approach and those of recent translation theories, 'even when the latter are grounded on postcolonial principles' (2003, 10). These decolonial scholars thus emphasise the difference between their perspective and postcolonial ones, suggesting by implication that the latter are still embedded in the translation–conversion paradigm.

However, when we examine Mignolo and Schiwy's analysis of the Zapatistas' translation practice, it is difficult to see how it is significantly different from the translation and writing practices analysed by postcolonial scholars. This is notably the case with regard to Mignolo and Schiwy's elaboration of the role played by syncretism, which they see as key to the newness of the Zapatistas' approach. More usually associated with religious or cultural practices, when applied to language, Mignolo and Schiwy argue that syncretism offers a means of resisting the imperial logic of translation:

> syncretism as practice may indicate a long-standing strategy of translation/transculturation that has worked against imperial translations . . . In the case of the Zapatistas . . . translation from Amerindian languages to Spanish no longer implies a unidirectional translation of Amerindian languages into Spanish concepts and systems of understanding. Rather, an Amerindian understanding is rendered in and even in violation of Spanish syntax, becoming transformed in the process but not entirely losing its difference from Western understanding.
>
> (2003, 12)

To explore this phenomenon further, the authors cite a speech by one of the Zapatistas, Major Anna Maria, given in Spanish in 1997.[5] Drawing attention to the final sentence, which in Spanish reads 'Detrás de nosotros estamos ustedes', glossed by Mignolo and Schiwy as 'We are at you', Mignolo and Schiwy point out that the use of 'estamos' in the sentence is 'ungrammatical' (2003, 8). They describe Maria's manipulation of Spanish as being a 'fracture in the sentence that is produced by the intervention of the "other" grammar, the grammar of an Amerindian language' (2003, 8): Tojolabal. Mignolo and Schiwy stress that this fracture is not only linguistic, but also cosmological, since it points to the Tojolabal worldview in which 'persons, living systems and nature are not objects but subjects' (2003, 8). This 'syncretism' (2003, 12) is contrasted with the missionary/colonial translations according to which Amerindian concepts were translated into Spanish ones and thus absorbed into the logic of coloniality. In the Zapatistas' approach, by contrast, 'an Amerindian understanding is rendered in and even in violation of Spanish syntax, becoming transformed in the process but not entirely losing its difference from Western understanding' (2003, 12). This is therefore a kind of translation

that preserves difference, the Amerindian languages and worldview present in the strangeness or non-conformity of the European language. Although Mignolo and Schiwy suggest that syncretism itself has a 'long-standing history' (2003, 8), they insist on the originality of the Zapatistas' approach. 'The Zapatistas opened up a new possibility', they write, 'the possibility of speaking and writing Amerindian languages through Spanish, or using and appropriating Spanish as official language of the nation' (2003, 17).

However, this assertion of the uniqueness of the Zapatistas' uses of Spanish ignores the very similar innovations by African and Indian authors writing in English or French and theorised in postcolonial studies, notably in relation to the notion of writing back, key to postcolonial theory. Bill Ashcroft et al. (2002/1989, 67) write at length on the phenomenon of 'syntactic fusion' in the work of authors such as Gabriel Okara, John Kasipwalova and Vic Reid, inter alia, underlining the creative potential when the syntax of one language is overlaid on another. In the case of Reid's prose, for example, Ashcroft et al. (2002/1989, 70) argue that 'syntactic fusion is more than purely linguistic, for it includes the ranges of allusion, the nature of the imagery and the metaphoric orientation of the language of an oppressed people'. This emphasis on the broader implications of linguistic decisions is strongly anticipatory of the prominence given to the cosmological dimension of the Zapatistas' syncretism by Mignolo and Schiwy, analysed previously.

In *The African Palimpsest*, the postcolonial scholar Chantal Zabus (2007/1991) explores such syncretic phenomena in considerable depth,[6] adopting the term 'relexification' to denote practices through which writers suggest another (African) tongue whilst writing in a particular (European) language. Her description of what is at stake in Gabriel Okara's English in *The Voice* closely anticipates the argument that Mignolo and Schiwy would make for the Zapatistas' Spanish: 'relexification lets the Ijo tongue speak . . . the novel swarms with morpho-syntactic distortions . . . Such morpho-syntactic innovations can be traced to Ijo syntactical patterns' (Zabus, 2007/1991, 137). Similar ideas are explored in the volume *The Post-Colonial Question: Common Skies, Divided Horizons*, in which Iain Chambers (1996, 49) argues, for example, that the earlier 'imaginary unity' of the English language is challenged by the Englishes that are spoken and written elsewhere. Like Ashcroft et al., Chambers (1996, 49) explores the epistemological consequences of these linguistic disruptions, arguing that they interrupt 'the bondage of the Word . . . and its claims on the World'.[7] Challenges to colonial languages, in other words, are also challenges to the objectified representations of the other that accompanied Western conquests and empire building.

Similar ideas can be found in early translation studies work that sought to connect with postcolonial studies, such as the essays in *Post-Colonial Translation: Theory and Practice* (Bassnett and Trivedi, 1999).[8] To give just one example from this collection, Maria Tymoczko's (1999, 34) elaboration

of parallels between postcolonial writing and literary translation takes particular interest in the development of 'new forms which are not part of the dominant receptor system', suggesting that these are able to 'signal or encode . . . alternate experiences or beliefs'. Her comments on Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* have particular relevance. Citing the afterword to Hurston's book, Tymoczko argues that the 'unreconciled tension' between the two narrative voices – the one a 'literate voice in standard English', the other a 'highly idiomatic black voice' – allows Hurston to present 'a woman writer's revision of W.E.B. Du Bois's metaphor of "double consciousness" for the hyphenated African-American' (Gates, 1990/1937, 193–194, cited in Tymoczko, 1999, 34). Tymoczko is referring here to the idea that African Americans live always with what Du Bois (1897) terms a 'peculiar sensation', experiencing their selfhood inwardly as composed of two things ('an American, a Negro' (Du Bois, 1897)) rather than one single unified self-consciousness. Tymoczko's reference to Du Bois is significant for our discussion, since Du Bois belongs to the genealogy of thinkers which decolonial scholars has constructed for itself. Maldonado-Torres (2008, 8), for instance, describes one of the 'fundamental contribution[s]' of Du Bois as being to 'examin[e] the pathology of the world from the position of those regarded as most pathological and non-human'. This resonates strongly with Tymoczko's analysis of Hurston: doubly non-human because of being a woman as well as Black, Hurston carves a space for her own perspective, her own pathology.

It is thus difficult to see how Mignolo and Schiwy's (2003, 23) analysis of the 'way of speaking, talking and thinking in between languages' modelled by the Zapatistas marks a fundamental break with all that has gone before. On the contrary, their elaboration of syncretism in the Zapatistas – exploring the space 'between languages' (Mignolo and Schiwy, 2003, 23); producing a 'fracture' (2003, 8) in one language through the intervention of another; staging 'political intervention by subaltern languages' (2003, 12) – points to confluences between decolonial and postcolonial translation, rather than difference.[9] Yet throughout their piece, Mignolo and Schiwy insist that there is a 'fundamental difference' (2003, 10) between the Zapatistas' approach to translation and those of academics, even where these are 'grounded on postcolonial principles' (2003, 10). They illustrate this difference with reference to the work of postcolonial scholar Lydia Liu, summarising her argument in the briefest of terms before dismissing it on the basis that it exploits the violence of the colonial encounter and does not give sufficient thought to geopolitics:

> Unlike our exploration of the Zapatismo in Mexico, however, Liu capitalises on the violence accompanying colonization and colonial relations as well as the cooperation of colonial intellectuals in translating from English

> into Chinese – the focus of much recent postcolonial work. The difference is that Liu does not question the geopolitical directionality of translation – that is, the relations between language, knowledge, and power.
>
> (Mignolo and Schiwy, 2003, 10)

It is difficult to know what to make of this strongly worded yet minimally illustrated criticism of Liu's work. To my mind, the criticism seems straightforwardly inaccurate. Far from ignoring the geopolitics of translation, Liu presents an incisive analysis of the connections between translatability and power relations, arguing:

> In thinking about translatability between historical languages, one cannot but consider the actual power relations that dictate the degree and magnitude of sacrifice that one language must make in order to achieve some level of commensurability with the other.
>
> (1999, 34–35)

Liu's comment is made in the context of an elaboration of how modern Chinese came to have a third-person pronoun: 'for millennia', Liu argues,

> the Chinese had lived comfortably with the ungendered written form *ta* and other ungendered deictic forms, until the need to translate the feminine pronoun from European languages was suddenly thrust upon their attention in the early years of this century. Chinese linguists and translators proceeded to invent a written character that would be capable of translating the 'equivalent' pronouns in the European languages.
>
> (1999, 28)

Liu explains that this is how the radical 'nü' came to replace the ungendered 'ren', thus creating a feminine pronoun that has since been institutionalised to such an extent that Chinese feminists of today have forgotten that such an ungendered form once existed. Liu draws on this example to stress precisely that which Mignolo and Schiwy say she overlooks: the invention of this 'equivalent' is indicative of 'unequal exchange between Chinese and European languages . . . In contrast, English and the metropolitan European languages have not experienced a similar need in modern times to adapt the formal characteristics of the other languages' (1999, 34). Mignolo and Schiwy's negative evaluation of Liu's work is thus unjustified, since Liu explicitly addresses asymmetries of power and shows how these play into translation processes.

Following their criticism of Liu, Mignolo and Schiwy move to a generalised criticism of postcolonial translation theory, dismissing the achievements

of a second postcolonial scholar, Tejaswini Niranjana, by including reference to her 1992 book *Siting Translation* in brackets alongside Liu:

> While the Zapatistas' political visions stem from the translation of Western thought into Maya cosmovision and vice versa . . . postcolonial approaches to translation (e.g. Liu, 1999; Niranjana, 1992) seem to want to prove that an original, multiple way of thinking is legitimized in its existence by the European master's deconstructions. However, this need for legitimation only reinstates the colonial directionality of translation/transculturation.
>
> (2003, 10)

Once again, it is difficult to reconcile this strong and sweeping criticism with the reality of postcolonial scholarship. Like Liu, Niranjana is concerned to expose and challenge relations between language, knowledge and power, and indeed criticises early translation studies for failing to address such issues. Amongst her examples of this failure are Susan Bassnett-McGuire's (1980) book *Translation Studies*, in which according to Niranjana Bassnett-McGuire 'speaks blithely of "general principles" that "can be determined and categorized . . . *regardless of the language involved*' (1992, 59; emphasis in original). Niranjana (1992, 72) concludes that 'statements like this one seem oblivious to the relations of power implicit in a translation' and underscores the need for 'a new conception of translation' that 'take[s] into account what the discourses suppress: the asymmetrical relations between languages'.[10] Niranjana also questions geopolitical directionality in the sense of *who* translates when she challenges the conceptualisation of cultural translation developed by Talal Asad on the basis that it 'seems to assume that the only translators are Euro-American ones re-presenting a non-Western other' and thus 'leaves too little room for the use of translation as an act of resistance' (1992, 84). Niranjana thus criticises the underlying assumptions of colonial translation paradigms and calls for space to be given to alternative directionalities and functions.

Neither Liu nor Niranjana, then, seem to merit the criticism levelled at them by Mignolo and Schiwy. On the contrary, many of their arguments align closely with Mignolo and Schiwy's (2003, 3) critique of translation in the service of conversion, with its stress on the double movement of construction and erasure of difference. Niranjana (1992, 2), for example, elaborates translation's contribution to the representation of the colonised 'who need to be produced in such a manner as to justify colonial domination'. She also observes that the historical complicities between translation and conversion entailed 'movement toward totalization' (1992, 63) and the 'effort to erase difference' (1992, 63). Liu (1999, 1) points to the same processes when she states:

> The universalizing tendencies of modernity have always called upon the service of the translator to spread its gospel elsewhere. (We might as well

> take the religious trope literally here, because the Christian missionaries were the self-appointed pioneers in these processes.) Universalism thrives on difference. It does not reject difference but translates and absorbs it into its own orbit of antithesis and dialectic.

Both Liu's and Niranjana's critiques of translation thus closely anticipate Mignolo and Schiwy's (2003, 7) argument that 'the missionaries' translation constructed the colonial difference at the same time [*sic*] the missionaries intended to erase this difference by assimilation through conversion'.

In what sense, then, might Liu and Niranjana be accused of 'seem[ing] to want to prove that an original, multiple way of thinking is legitimized in its existence by the European master's deconstructions' (Mignolo and Schiwy, 2003, 10)? This certainly does not seem to me to be the thrust of either of their arguments. A clue lies perhaps in Mignolo and Schiwy's use of the word 'deconstructions', though we have to look outside this particular essay to understand their possible line of reasoning. The decolonial group's antipathy towards deconstruction – which they consider beholden to and inextricable from Western metaphysics – is well known. It goes hand in hand with their criticism of what they perceive as the intellectual elitism of postcolonial theory, and constitutes one of the major ways in which they differentiate their own work from that of postcolonial scholars (see, for example, Asher, 2013, 833; Colpani et al., 2022, 8).

In *Local Histories/Global Designs*, for instance, Mignolo (2012, 37) dismisses the possibility of perceiving and theorising the coloniality/modernity matrix using deconstruction on the basis that it is a critique from within rather than without modernity:

> The geohistorical density of the modern/colonial world system, its interior (conflicts between empires) and exterior (conflicts between cosmologies) borders, cannot be perceived and theorized from a perspective inside modernity itself (as is the case for world system analysis, deconstruction, and different postmodern perspectives).

He expounds on this point later in the same book in the context of a discussion of Abdelkébir Khatibi's engagement with Derrida. Mignolo suggests that while Khatibi sees deconstruction and decolonisation as mutually compatible, deconstruction's alignment with the universal renders it irreducibly different to decolonisation and indeed means that 'deconstruction has to be subsumed and transformed by decolonization' (2012, 45). Mignolo's view of deconstruction is premised on a brief engagement with some lines from *Le monolinguisme de l'autre*, and specifically Derrida's observation 'je ne voudrais pas me servir trop facilement du mot "colonialism. [*sic*]" Toute culture est originairement coloniale . . . I . . . would not like to abuse the word "colonialism." All culture is

originally colonial' (Derrida, 1996, 68, cited in Mignolo, 2012, 83; English translation unattributed)). Mignolo (2012, 83) concludes from this that Derrida has 'problems with colonialism' and surmises that these problems 'are related to his resistance, and perhaps blindness, to the colonial difference' (2012, 83). Instead of colonial difference, Mignolo argues (2012, 83), Derrida sees 'universal culture'.

Although it is true that the relevance of Derridean thinking to postcolonial studies has been widely debated within postcolonial studies itself,[11] Mignolo's argument seems unfair on two counts. First, Derrida's reluctance to reach too quickly for the word 'colonialism' arises precisely because he is endeavouring to avoid a universalising gesture. While it might be tempting to speak of the situation that obtained during his schooldays in Algeria as a colonial politics of language, to do so risks 'effac[ing] the arrogant specificity or traumatizing brutality of what is called modern colonial war in the "strictest definition" of the expression' (Derrida, 1998, 39). To Derrida's mind, then, there is a distinction to be maintained between the most extreme and violent forms of colonialism and the apparently relatively innocuous question of language choices available to schoolchildren. At the same time – and this is my second objection to Mignolo – Derrida (1998, 39) suggests that the extreme form of colonialism can itself reveal 'the colonial structure of any culture in an exemplary way'. In this, Derrida is appealing to an Aristotelian logic, already evoked in the first part of *Le monolinguisme de l'autre*, in which Derrida (1998, 11; emphasis in original) seeks to 'know what Franco-Maghrebian is' by finding the most Franco-Maghrebian person: 'we model ourselves upon what *is* "most this or that" or what *is* "the best this or that" . . . in order to reach down to thinking the being of what is *in general*'.

In a sense, the idea that colonial situations allow us to understand the operating of cultures more generally might be seen as corroborating Mignolo's accusation that Derrida is interested only in the universal. This is indeed Mignolo's (2012, 83) logic: he uses Derrida's statement 'toute culture est originairement coloniale' to deduce that Derrida is interested in 'the coloniality of universal culture'. However, the meaning of the phrase 'toute culture' in its immediate context is not 'all culture' in the sense of some universally shared culture but 'all culture' in the sense that all specific cultures share certain characteristics. This emerges clearly from Derrida's use of the example of French cultural and linguistic history to drive home his point, as well as his enumeration of the varying guises in which such coloniality appears:

> Toute culture est originairement coloniale. Ne comptons pas seulement sur l'étymologie pour le rappeler. Toute culture s'institue par l'imposition unilatérale de quelque 'politique' de la langue. La maîtrise, on le sait, commence par le pouvoir de nommer, d'imposer et de légitimer les appellations. On sait ce qu'il en fut du français en France même, dans la

> France révolutionnaire autant ou plus que dans la France monarchique. Cette mise en demeure souveraine peut être ouverte, légale, armée ou bien rusée, dissimulée sous les alibis de l'humanisme 'universel', parfois de l'hospitalité la plus généreuse. Elle suit ou précède toujours la culture comme son ombre.
>
> (1996, 68)

> All culture is originally colonial. In order to recall that, let us not simply rely on etymology. Every culture institutes itself through the unilateral imposition of some 'politics' of language. Mastery begins, as we know, through the power of naming, of imposing and legitimating appellations. We know how that went with French in France itself, in revolutionary France as much as, or more than, monarchical France. This sovereign establishment may be open, legal, armed, or cunning, disguised under alibis of 'universal' humanism, and sometimes of the most generous hospitality. It always follows or precedes culture like its shadow.
>
> (1998, 39)

Not incidentally, this meaning of 'toute' emerges clearly through Patrick Mensah's English translation of this passage, which renders the second 'toute culture' as 'every culture' (signifying cultures in the plural) rather than 'all culture' (implying universality). By suggesting that 'all culture is originally colonial' – and not just in the sense that the words 'culture' and 'colonial' can both be traced back to the Latin *colere* (to cultivate) – Derrida is thus observing that any entity which calls itself a 'culture' – particularly perhaps national cultures ('French culture', 'German' culture, and so on) – has at its historical roots a strategy of repression of those elements that it excludes in order to define itself. Just as the French language became the language of France by persecuting and suppressing other languages that were in use in France, so too 'French culture' became the culture of France on the basis of what it repressed (did not name or named as deviant) as much as of what it affirmed (named or named as worthy).

From Derrida's perspective, colonial war 'reveals the colonial structure of any culture in an exemplary way' (1998, 39), serving as the extreme that allows us to 'reach down to thinking the being' (1998, 11) of how cultures and languages operate in general. There is thus a universalism here, but it is not the kind of universalism that Mignolo diagnoses: far from ignoring the mechanisms of coloniality (the colonial difference) in favour of a universalising Western metaphysics, Derrida's universalism underscores the presence of colonial mechanisms in all cultures.[12] Monolingualism of the other thus has little to do with the 'monotopic vision . . . of a homogenous knowing subject located in a universal no-man's land' (2012, 18) diagnosed by Mignolo. Instead, the 'monolingualism of the other would be

that sovereignty, that law originating from elsewhere' (Derrida, 1998, 39), namely that 'sovereign establishment' (Derrida, 1998, 39) which enforces some politics of language, already and always colonial. In Rey Chow's (2008, 220) words, monolingualism of the other 'means, first and foremost, a monolingualism coerced and imposed by the other'. In this sense, it stands not in opposition to the notion of *colonial difference* so crucial to decolonial scholars like Mignolo, but offers another perspective on the same phenomenon. Furthermore, far from being opposable to bilingualism (as Mignolo suggests), monolingualism of the other can operate on two (or more) languages just as well as it can on one. Arabic language and Islamic culture are not exempt from this mode of operating, repressing certain elements (of Arabic, of Islam) in order to establish and affirm themselves. The monolingualism of the other, in other words, is in operation in Khatibi's bilingual situation in the same way as it is in Derrida's monolingual one.

Returning to Mignolo and Schiwy's dismissal of existing postcolonial translation scholarship in 'Double Translation', a more convincing argument for the distinction between decolonial and postcolonial scholarship – though not one that they formulate themselves – might rest on the primacy given to Indigenous as opposed to Western thinking. In early postcolonial scholarship, the emphasis is strongly on the consequences of the translation intervention for the European language and traditions: the African, Jamaican, Papua New Guinean (and so on) author is seen to be writing back to the centre, with all the implications for the centre that that entails. Ashcroft et al. (2002, 32) thus argue that dominated literatures have 'an inevitable tendency towards subversion': 'directly and indirectly, in Salman Rushdie's phrase, the "Empire writes back" to the imperial "centre" . . . by questioning the bases of European and British metaphysics, challenging the world-view that can polarize centre and periphery in the first place' (2002, 32). The focus on the centre emerges strongly in other postcolonial analyses such as the essay by Chambers (1996, 49): 'Inhabiting English, other stories, memories and identities cause metropolitan authority to stumble. For they talk back to it, take the language elsewhere, and then return with it to interrupt the nation-narration at its very "centre"'. As I have argued elsewhere with specific reference to the disruptions to French that are found in literary works by some African authors, to assume that hybrid writing always carries this centre-disrupting significance is to privilege one particular (European) standpoint over others (see Batchelor, 2009, 36).

By contrast, in Mignolo and Schiwy's (2003, 7) analysis, there is sustained emphasis on the 'subaltern perspective' that the Zapatistas bring to the debate. Whilst this is sometimes couched in ways that are barely distinguishable from the writing back paradigm of the early postcolonial scholars,[13] on other occasions the emphasis falls on the new elements that Amerindian knowledges bring to theory and politics, rather than purely on their ability

to challenge European paradigms. The distinction is of necessity a subtle one, since any newness can also be read as challenge, depending on the perspective of the receiver.[14] Nevertheless this may offer some grounds for Mignolo and Schiwy's insistence on differentiation from postcolonial scholarship. Consider, for example, the following argument, which emphasises plurality of perspective rather than challenges to the dominant perspective: 'The dictum "Because we are all equal we have the right to be different" is the most concise and clear formula of the colonial difference as a place of translation/transculturation from a perspective of subalternity' (Mignolo and Schiwy, 2003, 7). However, given the relative subtlety of this distinction as well as the fact that insistence on plurality is far from absent from postcolonial translation scholarship,[15] I would still view Mignolo and Schiwy's claims about the radicality of the Zapatistas' achievement with a high degree of reservation.

My brief attempt to stage a conversation between Mignolo and Schiwy and early postcolonial theory thus exposes both the potential and the difficulties of such an endeavour. On the one hand, as I have shown with my exploration of the Zapatistas' syncretism and its similarities with literary innovations analysed under the writing back paradigm, there is much that decolonial and postcolonial scholarship have in common. Both have a keen awareness of the political significance of linguistic innovation against the backdrop of colonial power dynamics; both are interested in the potential for translation to intervene in and resist those power dynamics, rather than complying with or strengthening them. On the other hand, I have shown that there is no easy starting point for such a conversation, owing largely to decolonial scholars' dismissal of postcolonial theory. In the case of Mignolo and Schiwy's treatment of Liu and Niranjana, I have demonstrated that this is based in turn on Mignolo's dismissal of Derrida, itself anchored in a cursory and problematic reading of *Le monolinguisme de l'autre*. My chapter thus offers further evidence for an argument made by Bill Ashcroft more than two decades ago: with respect to the debate on postcolonialism in Latin America, he argues that 'objections to postcolonial analysis have been based on a limited and academically defensive view of the discourse' (1998, 8). For as long as this state of affairs continues to hold, any attempt to stage conversations between decoloniality and postcolonialism must first take several steps backwards, interrogating the claims that decolonial scholars make about postcolonial theory, and restoring to postcolonial theory both its complexity and its commitment to self-critique.

Notes

1 For an overview of the institutionalisation of postcolonial studies, see Parry (2004a).
2 A less polarised and more subtle position is taken by Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2006), who, as De Jong (2022, 92) argues, 'straddles different positions', aligning

himself with decolonial thinkers (and being claimed by them), while also considering himself a postcolonial thinker. In a sense, engaging in intellectual debate with postcolonial theory would fall outside the concerns of decoloniality, since it would be a critique of European traditions rather than foregrounding those of the *damnés*.

3 See in particular Ella Shohat (1992); see also, for example, Stuart Hall (1996), Neil Lazarus (1999), Benita Parry (2004b).

4 I note in passing the echo in this statement of a claim made by Mignolo (1993, 127) about Edmundo O'Gorman's *The Invention of America*, which he sees as marking the 'demolition of four hundred years of historiographical writing'.

5 They cite the speech in English translation, but their analysis itself is of the Spanish version.

6 I label Zabus a postcolonial scholar on the basis of her appeal to postcolonial theory in *The African Palimpsest*, her professorial title (Professor of Comparative Postcolonial and Gender Studies) and her direct contribution to discussions of the postcolonial canon (see Zabus, 2014).

7 Chambers's (1996) essay also offers an important counter to the decolonial scholars' generalisation that postcolonial studies dates its period of interest only as far back as the European colonisations of the nineteenth century. Chambers (1996, 48) explores 'the particular configuration of hegemony that emerged in the wake of European conquest and colonialism after 1500'.

8 The fact that Bassnett and Trivedi's volume was published in 1999 and the essay by Mignolo and Schiwy in 2003 does not of course mean that Mignolo and Schiwy had access to it when writing their piece, owing to the often significant décalage between research and its reception.

9 Justification for these parallels finds further support in Zaslavsky's (2006, 128) comparisons between the Zapatistas' Spanish and the language in 'littérature dite postcoloniale' (literature termed postcolonial).

10 In fact, as is known from well-rehearsed narratives of the translation studies discipline, translation scholars such as Susan Bassnett were already moving away from these universalising descriptive assumptions at the time of the publication of Niranjana's book – see notably Bassnett and Lefevere (1990) and Lefevere (1992).

11 See Hiddleston (2009) for a detailed elaboration of these debates.

12 My reading concurs with Rey Chow's (2008, 224; emphasis in original) observation that 'Derrida reads colonialism as both specific and universal: colonialism is a specific instance of the appropriation of language by the use of force or cunning; at the same time, *all* practices of language involve such appropriation'. Towards the end of his essay, however, Chow (2008, 227) reopens this question, asking where Derrida's views 'leave the historicality of the unequal encounters of language'.

13 See, for example, the suggestion that 'the Zapatistas' enactment and theory of translation . . . was performed . . . in resistance against and transformation of global designs' (Mignolo and Schiwy, 2003, 7). Here notions of 'resistance . . . and transformation' would be hard to distinguish from the postcolonial notions of abrogation and appropriation (see, for example, Ashcroft et al., 2002, 37).

14 To further complicate matters, Mignolo and Schiwy (2003, 8) themselves acknowledge that the Zapatistas' perspective does not stand in pure opposition to Western ones: 'the question of translation/transculturation is no longer one of dualism. We are no longer facing the question of "the West and the Rest" but "the Rest in the West" as well as "The West in the Rest"'.

15 See for example Bandia (2008, 149): 'Code-switching and mixing as practised in African Europhone literature provide ample proof of the need to expand translation theory to include such instances of linguistic and cultural transfer which call for resisting or countering assimilative or hegemonic forces, and thus preserving pluralism'.

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3

REPARATIVE TRANSLATION, DECOLONIALITY, METACOLONIALITY

Paul F. Bandia

The unpredictable and turbulent times we are living in have made thought and discourse in the field of translation studies infinitely more complex and contested, at least for those researchers preoccupied with the ethical and social justice dimension of the field. The current climate of rampant and fragmented globalisation is characterised by power asymmetry and language inequality between the Global South and the Global North, between postcolonial subjects and spaces and the colonial metropole, between indigenous peoples and settler colonists, and between racialised and non-racialised identities. The upheavals and turbulence of our times have been marked by activism of all kinds ranging from the struggles for Indigenous rights and freedoms to the assertions of postcolonial and post-slavery identities, migrants, the challenges of living in predominantly white spaces, and the push for restorative justice for racialised communities worldwide, as well as the fight for equality for marginalised groups based on gender and sexual orientation. At the centre of these struggles has been the quest for representation, diversity, and inclusion, particularly in an era I refer to as post-postcolonial or metacolonial. Some of these are factors are made manifest in translingual and transcultural practices informed by theories of decoloniality and translation, which are the basis of the theory and practice of *reparative translation*.

My conceptualisation of reparative translation is wedged within the particular relation of translation to the specific history of peoples and cultures forever defined by the experience of colonisation and slavery. From its inception, the discourse on translation theory and practice has largely been Eurocentric, preoccupied with matters of adequacy and correctness in literary and cultural transfer as determined by Western imperialist ethos and belief systems. The undue emphasis on linguistic equivalency that held sway in

DOI: 10.4324/9781003351986-4

the context of transfer between cognate Western imperial language cultures seemed irrelevant for those marginalised language cultures at the receiving end of imperial dispensation. It became clear that these cultures that had been relegated to the margins of mainstream scientific pursuits could only find relevance not by parodying Western approaches to translation inquiry but by trailblazing a path for themselves that would in fact build on the effects of colonialism and slavery that had been used to consign them to the periphery of mainstream thinking in translation studies. There were doubts as to whether non-European cultures, particularly those forged by the experience of colonialism and slavery, had any original thought or theory on translation phenomena. Even when there was interest in non-Western thought in translation and cross-cultural communication, the tendency was to view this as mere fodder for research without much impact on mainstream preoccupations with translation phenomena. I was quick to point out that as cultures steeped in orality, postcolonial and post-enslavement societies had a great deal to contribute to expanding translation theory and discourse, given their unique perspective based on the interface between orality and writing and the intersection of Western and non-Western philosophies that had become rooted in their identity. Postcolonial and post-enslavement histories are perhaps the missing link in the quest for a truly global or universal translation discourse.

The historical concept of reparation is today being played out in realpolitik in the superdiversity of our global communities as demands for equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) become the cornerstone (or bedrock) of decolonial movements. Following this trend, reparative translation seeks to redress the inequities and power differentials resulting from the condition of colonisation and/or enslavement that are manifest in encounters between subaltern and dominant language cultures. Reparative translation explores the concept of debt to seek restitution rather than retribution in the quest for justice and a more balanced representation of otherness in global translation discourse. The current climate of global activism in relation to the struggles against systemic racism and gender inequality or for the rights of LGBTQ+ and other marginalised groups is rife with opportunities to explore the concept of reparative translation. The quest for social justice and redress is at the crux of reparative translation as an ethical translation practice. It is not surprising therefore that the concept of reparative translation overlaps with frameworks such as restorative justice, intersectionality, and critical race theory, which have their roots in legal theory. Elaborated by legal scholars, these frameworks have over the years been applied to serving the cause of justice in many spheres characterised by power differentials within society. The frameworks are indeed enlightening of the preoccupations of postcolonial and decolonial translation discourse whose main objective is centred on addressing issues of power imbalance between minoritarian and majoritarian

language cultures, between the imperial power and its satellites, and ultimately between the Global South and the Global North. Thanks to their multidisciplinary quality, I draw on these frameworks to enhance my reflection on the concept of reparative translation, which essentially attempts to elaborate a framework for elucidating and redressing the inequities brought about by colonisation and slavery. Reparative translation is innovative and impactful insofar as it directs translation thinking away from mainstream homogenising conceptualisations and towards the concerns of dominated or minority cultures in the current context of globalisation.

There is a signifying overlap between the concepts of reparative translation and restorative justice (rendered even more evident in the French translation of the latter as 'la justice réparatrice' – literally 'reparative justice'). Restorative justice can be loosely defined as a criminal justice system that focuses on the rehabilitation of offenders through reconciliation with victims and the community at large. Restorative justice is often enacted through victim–offender mediation or dialogue, by using peace-making circles, and aiming for real restitution and the eradication of feelings like anxiety, helplessness, and powerlessness. Much like reparative translation, which seeks to counter the non-inclusive, Eurocentric views of mainstream, traditional translation theory and practice, restorative justice was founded as an alternative theory to the traditional methods of justice which often focus on retribution (retributive justice) rather than restitution. Howard Zehr (1990) argues that restorative justice represents a validation of values and practices that were characteristic of many Indigenous groups, whose traditions were often discounted and repressed by Western colonial powers. Zehr singles out the First Nations people of Canada and the US and the Māori of New Zealand as the main inspiration for this practice, which is also known as 'circle justice'. A similar practice of restorative justice can be found in traditional African society often referred to as 'palaver' ('palabre' in French) whereby village elders gather in the yard or under the palaver tree (baobab tree) to confer and render justice in a consensus manner with the aim of healing rather than punishing, so as to maintain social harmony within the community. The South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which has become a model for decolonisation practices across the globe, draws its inspiration from the African palaver and represents a modern-day practice of restorative justice. African palaver became a model for negotiation or discussion by means of interactive dialogue regarding matters of dispute, conflict resolution, reconciliation, and peace-making. The African palaver, in terms of its origin and practice on the continent, can therefore provide a trope for understanding African thought on translation theory and practice. Similar to the concept of translation as negotiation, or manipulation, translation as palaver evokes the back-and-forth, the give-and-take, bargaining, or even haggling, involved in the search for a felicitous encounter between

distant, remote, or noncognate languages and cultures. Palaver translation foreshadows reparative translation insofar as they both seek holistic interventions, through a process of negotiation and reconciliation, in bridging or mediating cultural and linguistic difference, in contexts historically fraught with hegemony and power imbalance. The African palaver model of translation theory and practice has serious implications for the significance of words, spoken or written, in apprehending translation as a process of negotiation, barter, and reconciliation in contexts of social justice and historical redress. In this regard, the palaver model constitutes the bedrock for reparative translation. Drawing on the framework of restorative justice, reparative translation seeks restitution rather than retribution, by confronting the feelings of anxiety and powerlessness caused by colonialism, slavery, and racialised microaggressions in predominantly White spaces. Reparative translation advocates an activism that envisions a kind of 'circle justice' whereby the dominated and the dominant seek common ground and understanding in the transcultural representation of the marginalised other. Reparative translation disrupts the dominant imperial language in order to account for the peculiarities of colonial encounters, the discourse of enslavement, and the ensuing hybridisation characteristic of contemporary cultural, linguistic, and literary practices. As a matter of social justice related to issues of equality, diversity, and inclusion, reparative translation has the potential to render the field of translation studies more transnational and inclusive beyond the narrow Eurocentrism emblematic of the discipline. As indicated earlier, translation studies contains hardly any references to non-European theoretical constructs, and diversity and representation are sorely lacking on several levels. These include the participation of racialised scholars; translating, promoting, and publishing works by such scholars; including these works in the curricula; and hiring racialised faculty and researchers. The imbalance between the current superdiversity of our twenty-first century classrooms and the largely monolithic faculty and management of European ancestry should be of concern to a discipline whose raison d'être is building bridges between cultures and peoples.

Reparation as a Metaphor for Translation

The question of reparation has dogged contemporary historiography since the abolition of slavery and the end of colonisation. The term 'reparation' is a trigger word that solicits strong feelings and knee-jerk reactions on opposite sides of the imperial divide. The fear of replacement or contamination or miscegenation can be seen in how Eurocentric translation's quest for fluency and transparency often results in the effacement of minority language and cultural traits. Parallels can be drawn between these Eurocentric inclinations and the desire for assimilative or domesticating translation practice.

Our understanding of reparation that is carried over into translation thought is for the most part informed by the early musings of Frantz Fanon with respect to the concept (Fanon, 1967). Fanon had argued that the struggle for Black liberation required looking beyond past injustices rather than allowing them to dictate the direction of a new world order. He believed that dwelling on such grievances could only tie colonised people to the past and thus prevent them from having a forward-looking view of the world. He states: 'I have neither the right nor the duty to demand reparations for my subjugated ancestors' (1967, 203, 1952, 185). For Fanon, any projection of reparation would become irrelevant once liberation has been won. He takes for granted that racialised and Black subjectivities must engage in a revolt against racial and colonial objectifications. They do not have to prove themselves to the White man but rather 'to demand humane behaviour from the other' (1967, 204, 1952, 186). Therefore, the only course available to Black and other racialised subjectivities is revolt against the idea of White existence, thereby forcing the oppressor to participate in a shared understanding of ethics. He states, 'There are no white worlds; there is no white ethics – any more than there is a white intelligence' (1967, 204, 1952, 186). Fanon did not only oppose the racialisation of ideas, concepts, values, and so on but also called for the destruction of Whiteness as a concept; in other words, the destruction of the philosophical claim that humanity is racialised. Fanon acknowledges that liberation from reflexive pasts by racialised subjectivities is indeed an act of faith, given that our world remains 'mired by the determinations of the past' (1967, 204–205, 1952, 186). He states firmly, 'I am not a slave to slavery that dehumanised my ancestors' (1967, 205, 1952, 186). Yet he believes that past values corrupt ethical actions and therefore the history of slavery and colonialism should not determine the liberation actions of the present and the future. In his view, liberation demands the invention of post-slavery and postcolonial subjectivities, exceeding all forms of oppression. Hence, an oppressive past does not absolutely determine an oppressive present and future, even though the oppressive situation cannot be entirely evaded in the choices available to the descendants of slavery and colonialism in the present (see Dhanvantari, 2019). Fanon, therefore, imagines a future beyond all racial and colonial determinations. This is a somewhat utopian view given the times we live in, what with all the current activisms, conflicts, and clashes determined by the historical realities of slavery, colonialism, and racialised aggressions.

I draw on Fanon's refutation of the past for establishing an ethical freedom or liberation in the present and the future, in conceptualising a reparative translation ethics aimed at achieving redress and reconciliation rather than retribution. However, as the truism goes, knowledge of the past is essential to building a better future. It is vital to make amends for and learn from the errors of the past for a more equitable existence in the future. With

that in mind, I draw on Fanon's hopeful and utopian discourse on reparation in order to trace a non-confrontational or non-vindictive trajectory for our conceptualisation of reparative translation with a keen awareness of the iniquities of the past and their impact on our living consciousness.

Reparative Translation and Social Justice

In light of a reparative translation ethics, it is significant to discuss the various communities engaged in activism worldwide fighting for the rights of marginalised peoples or groups and drawing attention to injustices and inequities whose resolution is long overdue. Beyond the preoccupation with neocolonialism in the postcolony and the diaspora, there is a growing sense of urgency globally to address issues related to indigenous rights, intersectionality, class, gender, sexual orientation–LGBTQ+, and racism. Postmodern ideas such as *decoloniality* and critical race theory have set the ball rolling on struggles such as those of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement against White supremacy, anti-Black racism, and cultural appropriation. We can see that the perception and use of language plays an important role in these societal conflicts, as the use of racist epithets or names depicting minority icons such as Aunt Jemima, Uncle Ben, and Native American heroes as emblems for capitalist gains have come under attack. These epithets or names are to be effaced or rewritten in order to be mindful of the concerns of ethnic or linguistic minorities. Professional sports organisations are changing their names now considered to be disrespectful of Native American culture. Companies have been forced to change their racist branding. A slew of rebranding is going on either to right a wrong or for profiteering. Non-binary identities are reshaping grammatical usage in some languages, emphasising the use of non-gendered referents or pronouns. BIPOC communities, often the hardest hit, are clamouring for better environmental conditions and tackling climate change. Governments, academia, and business institutions, and their employees, are stepping up to acknowledge appropriated Indigenous lands or territories on which they have been established for generations. There is *a kind of retranslation* or re-presentation at work here driven by the activism of minoritised communities who, in spite of their minority status, do represent a key force in the globalised culture of consumerism, a fact that is not lost on the dominant economic class.

Intersectionality is a theoretical paradigm that focuses on marginalised and minoritised groups and challenges the *anglonormativity* or *linguistic indifference* inherent in dominant systems or societies. Intersectionality encourages transcultural and transnational understandings across various contemporary social and ideological spaces. While intersectionality challenges *anglonormativity*, it can also point us as language specialists towards challenging 'linguanormativity', which is the desire to overcome the dominance

of colonial or imperial languages in order to account for other marginalised linguistic experiences. This calls attention to contemporary literary, cinematic, and other forms of cultural production inspired by the complex intersections of identities within the linguascape. Intersectionality is relevant in postcolonial, transnational, and translingual contexts for the study of interactions between dominant and minoritised communities. Intersectionality also engages the issues of (un)translatability and the commensurability of cultures. Ultimately, intersectionality intervenes in the complex relations in today's multicultural societies in an effort to decolonise transnational global spaces.

In many ways, the translation of linguistic minorities could be conceived as a decolonising project aimed at countering the effects of power asymmetry in the context of globalisation. Postmodern discourses deal variously with the overriding concern for the treatment of linguistic minorities in translation and how this has shaped translation discourse. Given the worldwide activism for social justice and equality, translation studies must endeavour to lift the veil of fidelity and transparency, an excuse for normative majoritarian practices, and engage in the hot-button issues of race, gender, sexuality, economic inequality, and the environment, which are some of the drivers of current language practices worldwide. It is timely and appropriate to explore these issues at a moment in history that continues to witness the reverberations or commotion caused by the demands of marginalised or minoritised communities worldwide.

Reparative Translation and Superdiversity

Over the last several decades we have witnessed an unparalleled movement or displacement of peoples as well as a shifting of geographical boundaries across the globe. Large-scale migration and unbridled globalisation have enhanced linguistic and cultural encounters at a much greater scale between and among societies with remote historical relations, resulting in a postmodern Babel, as it were, and thus locating translation at the very centre of human activity and existence. Reparative translation theory is relevant in dealing with current trends emerging from the experiences of linguistic minorities in the context of global migration. Superdiversity – which refers not only to the coexistence of so many diverse ethnicities in society but also to the commingling of populations and miscegenation among races – is often lauded as a possible solution to racial strife and the way forward for humanity (see Vertovec, 2007; Blommaert, 2013). However, this may be too optimistic an assessment, as superdiversity has its own drawbacks when it comes to matters related to social justice such as equality, diversity, and inclusion. The reality of diversity in the postcolony is significantly different from that in the Global North. Whereas diversity in the postcolony often evokes the

urban encounter of various ethnicities with tribal affiliations, in the Global North sustained migration from formerly colonised territories enhances the complexity of superdiversity in such multiethnic and multicultural societies. The migrant diaspora provides ample opportunity for understanding the relationship between the struggle for social justice in the postcolony and such struggles within transnational contexts in the Global North.

Reparative Translation and the Cultural Turn

Postcolonialism and cultural studies have had a significant impact on the evolution of translation studies, particularly within the framework of a cultural turn in the field. The cultural turn, it seems, had unshackled the many and diverse linguistic minorities whose voices were muffled within translation scholarship either because the imperial or global languages were construed as alien to them or because their interests whether political, cultural, or social, did not always fit into the straitjacket, mainstream, traditional translation discourse. In fact, in some ways their interests were sidelined perhaps because they clashed with the preoccupations of a mainly Eurocentric perspective on science, intelligence, and knowledgeability. The entire enterprise of 'writing back' (to the imperial centre) (Ashcroft et al., 1989) determines the intersection between postcolonialism, decoloniality, and translation studies. As I have argued elsewhere (Bandia, 2008), postcolonial writing in European languages is akin to translation whereby the linguistic minority seeks to appropriate a global language for the benefit of the community's specific literary emancipation. Postcolonial intercultural writing is akin to translation, as the minority writer is engaged in an act of representation of the non-racialised self by means of a global language in order to access the global literary space. Such writing is also a decolonising strategy which forces the global imperial language to submit to the linguistic and cultural peculiarities and aesthetics of societies forever defined by colonisation. It is interesting to see how Patrice Nganang submits the French language to the popular speak of ordinary folks in the urban centres of Cameroon in his prize-winning novel *Temps de chien* (2001) and Uzodinma Iweala's novel *Beasts of No Nations* (2005) about a child soldier, which was adapted into an award-winning film in 2015, reclaims the English language.

Outside translation studies proper, there is hardly any evocation of postcoloniality without allusion to translation as a phenomenon, whether pragmatically or metaphorically. Discourses on postcolonialism and related issues of pluralism and diversity are often couched in terms related to translation. For the most part, decolonial practices account for the linkages between postcoloniality and translation. Hence the absurdity of trying to decouple postcolonialism and decoloniality (see Batchelor in this volume). In fact, postcolonialism was born out of anti-colonial struggles, and postcolonial thought has been

nourished by efforts at decolonisation. Perhaps the distinction between 'post-coloniality' and 'decoloniality' being pushed by proponents of the latter (see Mignolo, 2014) is tenuous. On the one hand are formerly colonised societies that became politically independent, as well as established governments and administrations by the native or Indigenous peoples (such as in Africa). On the other are occupied or settlement colonies, which eventually gained some political independence from the imperial European countries but remained the preserve of descendants of the European nations, relegating the natives or Indigenous peoples (if they survived attempts at extermination or genocide) to the margins of power and society. One can argue that in this latter context, independence from imperial domination resulted in the autonomy and power of settlers and their descendants, while still perpetuating a colonial logic to the detriment of the natives and Indigenous populations. It seems to me that the variety of decoloniality, conceived of by its main proponents as distinct from postcoloniality, is mainly preoccupied with this ongoing settler colonisation and domination of Indigenous non-European peoples (such as in the Americas).

The interaction between language cultures and the carrying across between languages of unequal power relations, as is the case between the languages of the colonial metropole and the postcolony, are issues which are fundamentally related to what can be referred to as translation as representation. The latter relies heavily on decolonial practices facilitated by the cultural turn in translation, as well as in the social and humanities fields. Reparative translation thus participates in postcolonial discourse insofar as the main tenets are about decolonising relations between the centre and the periphery or the marginalised, the local and the global, or what Lawrence Venuti (1998) has referred to as 'majoritising' versus 'minoritising' cultures.

Multilinguality and Decoloniality

Translation theory has had to reckon with the predominance of multilingual practices in the larger proportion of human society. Multilingualism has always been the experience of those societies at the receiving end of imperial dispensation, as well as many other multiethnic communities free from imperial domination. Most societies have always lived with several languages, whether for trade or commerce, political or intercultural relations. It is often said that empires do not translate, which exposes the monolingual foundation of Eurocentric translation theory that assumes a transfer between stable monolithic entities. The reality of the multiplicity of cultures and multilingual existence for the vast majority of humanity has been at once daunting and promising for the evolution of translation studies.

The term multilinguality speaks to the unique ability of subaltern communities to invent, develop, and use language based on their multilingual

experience. The language of multilinguality is often steeped in the oral antecedents of such communities which intersect with the adopted colonial language. Multilinguality is not just about knowledge or awareness of many languages (such as in multilingualism) but rather the creation of a medium for poetic and aesthetic expression as a trace of cultural representation. Multilinguality is intrinsic to what I have referred to as the *post-postcolonial or metacolonial identity*. The term 'metacolonial' is used here to mean 'beyond the postcolonial' and as a substitute for its more lexically complex synonym 'post-postcolonial'. Subaltern communities embrace multilinguality as a way of life for social cohesion and solidarity in coerced multicultural societies, as a strategy of resistance to imperial imposition, as well as an emblem for cultural assertion within the global literary space. As much as art can often reflect reality, literary multilinguality often echoes real-life experiences in subaltern communities, particularly in the post-postcolonial era. Such multilinguality is regularly on display in other artforms such as popular music (including rap music), spoken word, and film (for example, Nollywood). When one listens to Francophone rap, the lyrics are neither entirely in French, nor entirely in African or Antillean varieties of French, but rather in a blend of multilinguality that evokes the experiences of life in the Parisian *banlieues* and the influences of African and African American speech. The same can be said for Afrobeats in the Anglophone sphere which have become global with a notable expression of multilinguality which is neither entirely in English, nor entirely in pidgin English, but in a fusion of languages including indigenous languages and other varieties spoken in urban centres in the postcolony and in the diaspora. Their preoccupations and themes are essentially post-postcolonial or metacolonial as they go beyond postcolonial concerns with anti-colonial ideologies and explore the representation of life as it is lived currently within the postcolony and the diaspora. Such representation is often achieved through decolonial practices that draw on Indigenous aesthetics or oral artistry. Reparative translation is essential to the kind of translation aesthetic conducive to the decolonised representation of post-postcolonial or metacolonial reality.

Multilinguality and Metacolonial Writing

Unlike postcolonial authors of the immediate post-independence era whose writing was construed mainly as a counter to colonisation, writers of contemporary postcolonial literature adopt a more centripetal or inward outlook focusing mainly on art, literature, and culture within the nationscapes rather than engaging in gut reactions to the whims of the colonial metropole. Unrestrained urbanisation in the postcolony due to rural exodus as a consequence of modernisation has brought disparate ethnicities into urban centres, creating a kind of ethnoscape where various languages and cultures coexist.

In spite of the official imposition of colonial languages, urban communities tend to relegate such European languages to officialdom and are at ease with locally derived languages resulting from the practices of multilinguality and heterolinguality. This often manifests in a kind of creolisation of language that is aimed at resolving linguistic differences and finding common ground in an urban language that transcends ethno-linguistic specificities and helps to circumvent colonial language dominance and authority. The locally minted languages tend to be more suited to the linguistic and cultural expectations of the multiethnic urban communities, enabling communication in spite of linguistic differences and providing an outlet for artistic and literary expressions beyond the potential of the imposed European language. These locally derived languages are decolonial in that they subvert normative usages of imposed colonial languages and undermine colonial authority still sustained by a kind of collusion between the local elite and colonial governmentality.

In African and Caribbean societies, for instance, besides the local varieties of standard English or standard French, there are pidginised and creolised languages such as West African Pidgin English (WAPE), 'le français populaire ou régional', as well as varieties such as 'franglais' which is often used by the youth for in-group solidarity and to establish a sort of pan-African or global relations beyond the confines of national borders. These hybrid languages flourish in music, film, and literature and convey a certain reality of contemporary postcolonial societies that complicate translation theory and practice. The idea of the 'postcolony' is not only a geopolitical construct but fundamentally *a state of being*; the fact of being a postcolonial subject in the global scheme of things whether living in the formerly colonised spaces or abroad in the diaspora. The agency of the postcolonial subject transcends colonial boundaries and remains the essence of formerly colonised peoples regardless of historical and political landscapes. In other words, the linguistic minority status of migrant communities in the metropole is heavily indebted to their postcolonial subjectivity. It is noticeable how the multilinguality of the postcolony extends to the communities of the diaspora through migration and mutates into other varieties through the specific experiences of migrant communities in the colonial metropole. For instance, the specific language of the Parisian *banlieues* or the urban speak of Black British youth in London is entirely homegrown, although it might intersect with linguistic trends in the urban settings in the postcolony. In the current context of globalisation, there are exchanges and movements between subjects in the postcolony and the diaspora, some of whom might still entertain relations with the ancestral home. Language has developed along this continuum between the postcolony and the diaspora that has been nourished by urban experiences in both landscapes. The artistic, cultural, and literary productions of the postcolony and the diaspora often share some common roots with overlapping performances that can be traced back to either landscape. For instance, in current times,

hip-hop or rap music has become a global phenomenon, taking on different linguistic incarnations, yet with a constant in terms of its linguistic hybridity and multilinguality. Fictional representations of the postcolony also draw on these trends making for complex writing techniques that call for complex translation strategies.

There is therefore a continuum between the specific uses of French in the African postcolony and in the African populations within migrant communities in France. Calixthe Beyala explores this continuum in her novel *Les honneurs perdus* (1996), which begins in the *bidonvilles* of Douala, in Cameroon, and ends up in the *banlieues* of Paris. In either context the French language is minoritised and claimed by migrant communities with the aim of asserting identity and calling attention to their respective conditions. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie traces a similar trajectory between an urban reality in Lagos, Nigeria, and African communities in the USA in her novel *Americanah* (2013), although in this case the narrative evolves in the opposite direction from America back to Nigeria. Imbolo Mbue's novel *Behold the Dreamers* (2016) is about a Cameroonian immigrant couple living in Harlem, New York, and their struggles to achieve the American dream, which turns out to be so elusive for them that they end up returning to their native Cameroon. There is a similar trajectory here between the postcolony and the diaspora, but what seems intriguing is the multlinguality (and heterolinguality) which juxtaposes Cameroonian English, African French, pidgin English, and the author's native Bakweri language. There is a deliberate confrontation of American and Cameroonian English, a play on the duality of 'Anglophonie' and 'Francophonie', and the assertion of pidgin as a lingua franca in West Africa enabling communication beyond and above ethnic or national boundaries. Pidgin English is the ideal language used by the illegal alien from Cameroon and his 'fake' immigration lawyer originally from Nigeria to circumvent American immigration officials. The task of the translator is to account for or replicate the multilinguality and heterolinguality of expression as a writing strategy deployed for a variety of reasons by authors from linguistic minorities. It must be grasped as a holistic approach to literary creativity rather than a mere scattering of languages in the narrative as signposts of identity. Multilinguality is inherent to their mode of discourse, which is reflective of *a generational shift from a postcolonial subjectivity to a racialised post-postcolonial agency*. Translation discourse must seek to account for the specificities of these minoritised language varieties as a true measure of the representation of otherness and EDI in the ever-evolving history of the global community.

The role and significance of reparative translation can be elucidated in Mbue's fairly recent novel set in New York (2016), which showcases subtle but effective resistance, subversion, and activism in an expression of *post-postcolonial* or *metacolonial multilinguality*. Viewed through the lens of

reparative translation, metacolonial multilinguality can be expressed intralingually as well as interlingually. The former involves the sociolinguistic code-mixing or code-switching between locally derived varieties of the colonial or imperial language, while the latter involves an interplay among various non-cognate languages coexisting within the specific global linguascape. The following excerpts from Mbue's novel will illustrate the process of reparative translation in metacolonial writing and the inherent multilinguality explored as both artistry and aesthetic forms of resistance and activism in postcolonial migrant literature.

Excerpt 1:

> He would have the house furnished with basic necessities and a housemaid hired by the time the family arrived.
>
> 'Look you,' Fatou said when Neni told her about the house and the maid. 'You gonno leave small one-room and go stay for mansion? Why Ousmane not do this for me, too?'
>
> 'So ask Ousmane to take you back home then,' Neni retorted.
>
> 'Ousmane no want go back home,' Fatou said. She paused and looked at the empty luggage lying on the living room floor. 'If only me, I go back. I go back to my village, build house near my mother and my father. I live quiet life, die quiet die. If only me, I go home *très bientôt*.'
>
> (2016, 57, 357)

In this conversation between the protagonist Neni and her francophone friend Fatou based in New York City, Fatou mixes pidgin English, a smattering of American-speak, and French. Expressions such as 'You gonno leave small one-room and go stay for mansion?', 'Ousmane no want go back home', 'If only me, I go back', 'I live quiet life, die quiet die', 'If only me, I go home *très bientôt*', showcase multilinguality in global diasporic writing. Reparative translation intervenes in the writing and reading process in order to make sense of the narrative. It also informs the kind of reasoning or thought process for conveying the multilinguality of metacolonial fiction. Mbue and writers of her generation are indeed engaged in fictionalisation that can be referred to as a millennial postcolonial fiction.

Excerpt 2:

> 'Listen to me', Bubakar said, somewhat impatiently. 'As far as Immigration is concerned, there are many things that are illegal and many that are gray, and by "gray" I mean the things that are illegal but which the government doesn't want to spend time worrying about. You understand me, *abi*? My advice to someone like you is to always stay close to the gray area

> and keep yourself and your family safe. Stay away from any place where you can run into police – that's the advice I give to you and to all young black men in this country. The police is for the protection of white people, my brother. Maybe black women and black children sometimes, but not black men. Never black men. Black men and police are palm oil and water. You understand me, eh?'
>
> (2016, 73–74)

Bubakar is a Nigerian posing as an immigration lawyer in New York. He seems industrious and clever and has learned the ropes, so to speak, in the difficult and unpredictable manoeuvring of the American immigration system. While he pretends to be hard at work for his poor and desperate African clients seeking legal immigration, he engages in a wily and manipulative discourse, essentially asking his clients to lie low as he evokes the fear of racism. This play for solidarity among Africans is nestled in the popular conversation regarding police brutality and maltreatment of people of African descent in America. Boubakar appeals to his interlocutors by peppering his speech with Africanisms such as '*abi*' and the proverb-like '*Black men and police are palm oil and water*'. His entire speech is fashioned after African oral narratives with the use of figurative language and metaphors, displaying a sense of wisdom and knowledgeability and so on. He plays on the idea of in-group solidarity to swindle his clients and encourage them to stay in America without the proper immigration status. It is interesting to note how police brutality and the killing of Black men in America, which triggered the Black Lives Matter movement, can be represented in postcolonial millennial fiction as a subtle form of resistance and activism. Reparative translation of an excerpt like this one would require a good grasp of the combined effect of the Africanisms and African oral artistry, as well as the mindset of African immigrants and asylum seekers desperate for acceptance in a host society that has at times proven hostile to people of African descent.

Conclusion

So far, I have sought to ground the concept or theory of reparative translation within its African antecedents which are informed by Africa's oral traditions. Reparative translation has been related to parallel concepts having to do with seeking justice, equity, and fairness such as 'circle justice' among Indigenous peoples in the Americas and Oceania, as well as critical race theory, restorative justice, and intersectionality. The chapter has shown how reparative translation operates in postcolonial contexts and enables the fictionalisation of history through writing and translation. At a time when there is a raging debate about the cultural appropriation of racialised aesthetics, translation research must engage the trans-representation of non-Western thought and

tradition in the interest of the extant plurality of concepts and knowledges of translation. Postcolonial migrant literature is referenced as an example to showcase reparative translation as a concept and a practice grounded in the main tenets of decoloniality. Using recent writing I have considered the post-postcolonial or metacolonial dispensation, showcasing how writers evoke multilinguality and issues relating to current global activism and pointing to the need for translation studies to engage seriously with current debates on EDI and decolonisation.

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4

FEMINISM AND TRANSLATION IN INDIA

Why We Need to Think About Language in Feminist Activism

Tejaswini Niranjana

The theorisation of translation in the colonial context during the 1990s, initiated in part by my book *Siting Translation* (Niranjana, 1992), opened up new questions about language and power, inequality, and representation. Critiques are now available of humanistic and ethnographic ideas of translation (Asad, 1986; Bassnett, 2014; Leavitt, 2014; Rafael, 1993), both of which were based on grasping literary value or cultural value through a universalist lens. Such critiques have helped open up the realm of linguistic translation to questions of the political, drawing attention to the asymmetries structuring all acts of translation. In the present chapter, I focus on the following questions. Why should we open up translation studies to ideas coming out of feminism, and why should feminism pay attention to translation? What goes into the making of the feminist subject in India? How do we understand the conjuncture of culture and gender in its specific manifestations in the South Asian subcontinent? How does the feminist engagement with translation contribute to decolonisation in both academia and activism?

The Question of Translation and Feminism

The reason to speak about feminism and translation in the same breath is a simple one for me at a personal level. I'm a practitioner of both (although I've been a translator longer than I've been a feminist), and in both domains there seems to be a blindness to, or an unwillingness to think about, why the other realm should be relevant to one's concerns. My chapter poses a challenge to this blindness and proposes that we open out translation studies to questions stemming from feminism. I also contend that feminism should pay attention to translation (the act if not the discipline). What might it mean to discuss

DOI: 10.4324/9781003351986-5

a social–political movement like feminism through the lens of translation? Although some of the key debates in Indian feminism have been engaged with by people who are largely Anglophone because of class and educational background, increasingly many women with less privileged upbringings have entered the arena of conceptual and political discussions around feminism, leading to a new clamour for translation from English into Indian languages and the other way around. I will return to this point later. But first let me talk about the vocabulary of feminist activism in India from a historical perspective. The ways in which activism formulates problems and the ways in which these problems are tackled have much to do with the transformative possibilities that unfurled as societies all over the world became modern from the nineteenth century onwards.

By 'modern' I refer to the multi-layered transformations in public life and personal subjecthood wrought by large historical forces such as the industrial revolution, colonialism, the rise of mass transport and communication, new modes of governance, and the emergence of bureaucracy. These forces impacted all societies even if each one mediated the effects in different ways given their specific histories, leading to different kinds of subject formation. Particularly in non-Western cultures, social transformation was initially framed as 'social reform' – whether this had to do with caste hierarchies or widow remarriage in India, or foot-binding and divorce for women in China, to take just a few examples. In the universalist and humanist imagination prevailing in colonial or semi-colonial societies from the late nineteenth century onwards, these were practices preventing the societies from being seen as human and humane. Therefore the practices had to be done away with. While this process was initially seen as one of reform, in some non-Western societies the process was eventually framed as a revolutionary one, and the social transformation embarked upon marked a distinct rupture with the past. In yet other societies like India, or the subcontinent more broadly, there was reform rather than rupture, although the reform could today be understood through the lens of translation.

I'm fascinated by how societies engage with their pasts as they embark on social transformation, and I'm aware this takes very different directions in various non-Western contexts. This too is a process of translation and needs to be understood as such. (I know that we run the risk of being imprecise when we use *translation* in so many different contexts, but I think we can continue to do so if we explain clearly what we mean by the usage in each context.) I suggest that in the non-Western world, much of our political activism – which includes the desire to change the ways in which societies live and how people relate to each other – has to do with conceptualising the past in such a way as to afford new possibilities in the future. This is as much a political task as it is a conceptual one. I further suggest that this conceptualisation of the past can be seen as an act of translation in which ways

of making meaning are approached both in their pastness and as they speak to the present time. When feminists engage with the culture–gender question in South Asia, they often challenge ideas of the past that position women in fixed or naturalised ways, even as they draw inspiration from exemplary female historical figures.

In the present chapter I argue that we need to reposition translation as a continuous looping between languages. This is especially relevant when discussing contemporary movements such as feminism in non-Western contexts. I give examples from Indian feminism and propose what goes into the making of the feminist subject in India. I contend that introducing the notion of translation into this field will help us better understand the conceptual and social terrain on which feminism has grown and is growing. I do not plan to offer historical information about the women's movement here, since there are several excellent resources for this (Kumar, 1993; Ray, 1999; Tharu and Niranjana, 1997). My attempt is to put together an analytical framework that helps us understand a few of the key concepts underlying feminist activism in India.

The Culture–Gender Question

I begin by revisiting a conceptual conjuncture – that of culture and gender – which has been central to feminist politics in India. The women's movement has engaged in various ways in the last thirty years with questions arising out of this conjuncture, whether it was in dealing with issues such as the Miss World Beauty Contest of 1994, the legal debate around the Uniform Civil Code in the mid-1990s, or the 1998 controversy around the film *Fire*. An earlier instance of such engagement was the debate concerning sati (widow self-immolation) in the 1980s. All of these moments were noteworthy for how they brought together unlikely forces fighting on the same side, even though their ideological underpinnings were opposed to one another. For example, in the debate over whether or not India needed a Uniform Civil Code that would provide the same legal protections to all citizens regardless of their religious background, right-wing nationalists who wanted to undercut the power of the Islamic clergy, along with left-wing feminists who supported women's empowerment, found themselves seemingly on the same side of the fence. A certain fraction of feminists, however, pointed to this contradiction and argued that to avoid it, culture and gender should be thought about together rather than in opposition to one another.

Feminist theory in India as it developed from the 1970s onwards drew on a critique of the nationalist project which took shape both pre- and post-independence. In an astonishingly diverse range of writings spanning history, sociology, art history, literary studies, and film studies, feminist scholars have analysed the formation of *normative femininity* in the context of discussions

about authentic Indianness. Approaching the problem from a different direction, some scholars have investigated the formation of the *normative citizen–subject* in India. They argue that the normative citizen–subject is informed by debates on the woman question as well as by new embodiments of masculinity and femininity. These scholars have pointed to the caste–class–religious identity of the normative citizen–subject, observing that the subject is by definition upper-caste, middle-class, and Hindu (Tharu and Niranjana, 1997).

Feminist historical scholarship in particular (for example, Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid's edited collection *Recasting Women*) was able to show that the formulation of notions of culture in India was premised on the figure of woman, thus pointing to the significance of the culture question under colonial rule (Sangari and Vaid, 1989). With culture understood here as a mark of distinctiveness and distinction in relation to the colonising West, we also gained insights into how a historically specific way of thinking about Indian women came to be naturalised, seen as something given rather than as a product of historical processes (Chatterjee, 1989; Banerjee, 1989).

If we can now turn our attention away from the making of gendered identities and onto the emergence of the culture question, we should take note of how this question is posed in the developing world, or more broadly in non-Western societies, as part of a colonial contestation. In India, for example, the Sanskrit term *sanskriti* has been used to translate the English word 'culture', thus actually summoning up some chimera called 'Indian culture'. Through the translation, the culture question is inscribed as an intimate part of the formation of a national(ist) modernity. However, within dominant narratives, culture *in modernity* needs to be represented as something that remains outside of modernity. This relationship between culture and modernity in the colonial as well as postcolonial context gives us a clue as to why women occupy such a central place in discussions about culture in Asia, when in normative Western feminist discourse there is an opposition between women and culture, with women being placed on the side of nature (John, 1998).

The National Culture Question

Although my main examples are from India, it's worth mentioning that when we think of the feminist stakes in the culture question there are certain similarities with other Asian settings. These stakes involve issues both of political and symbolic representation, as described in Kumari Jayawardena's classic work *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World*. Here the author argues that in the non-West the two titular movements for these modes of representation share a close relationship (Jayawardena, 1986). The 'culture question', therefore, can also be seen as a 'national culture question', with pivotal implications for women. Even as nationalist movements enable women's political participation, they also create for them a fixed position in the symbolism of

national or nationalised culture. We can see examples of this in the discursive production of the New Woman in societies as different as Japan, Korea, or India.

Across Asia, a criticism routinely levelled against feminists is that they are deracinated, Westernised, or alienated from their culture. Interestingly, this is not a charge levelled against any other political frameworks that we use, such as Marxism, which similarly often have no clearly identifiable indigenous source. Feminist demands for equal treatment are perceived as demands arising from 'modernisation', a process which is seen to erase 'our' culture and replace it with Western values and ways of life. To unravel the complex weave of this criticism and its durability, feminists need to develop a theory of how notions of culture have been put together in our societies.

One of our starting points might be to analyse how the creation of the national was based on the assertion of cultural difference from the West, with women frequently being represented as the embodiment of that difference. Nationalist discourse in the non-Western world implies an antithetical relationship between modernity and culture, which in turn implies an alignment of women with the *cultural* and the *authentic*. It is this sort of alignment that a number of young Indian feminist initiatives pitch up against today and try to engage critically with – whether it is Pinjra Tod, or the Feminism-in-India digital platform, or Ladiesfinger.[1] However, even in some of these groups there is a way in which gender–culture issues end up being articulated as part of a feminist common sense. This is a problem to which I would now like to turn.

The Language Question

In this section I consider the translation problem. I will move between the inter-linguistic idea of translation and one that signals both derivation and an exceeding of the original context. I begin with the idea that in a postcolonial context, political movements including feminism draw on a vocabulary that is perpetually in translation as they conceptualise and initiate political action. It is not my suggestion that we are translating Enlightenment rationality, symbolised by a formerly colonial language, into a space that represents its other. Instead, I argue that this formulation, familiar to us from a variety of disciplines, fails to account for the *already-translated* nature of our condition. The space of translation is one in which there is a simultaneous negotiation of different sorts of languages, conceptual as well as linguistic. If we can agree that this is the case, it would mean that these languages configure the questions asked and the resolutions sought in our context. It would also mean that the languages converge and diverge at different times or in different registers. While this is one level of the problem to be investigated, another level has to do with the unavailability of linguistic resources to understand this complex situation.

What do I mean by unavailability? Surely India has over two dozen major languages which have been in use for over a thousand years. What I mean is that these languages were relegated primarily to a cultural or aesthetic function as English took over the domain of higher education, especially that of the physical and social sciences, from the 1830s on. When the three oldest Indian universities were founded in 1857 in the Bombay, Madras, and Calcutta Presidency areas controlled directly by the British, English emerged as the main language of tertiary education and has remained so to this day. English is thus also the primary language of research and knowledge production. Analytical concepts and frameworks in all disciplines are almost always taken from the scholarship available in the West. The solution to this problem in the Indian context is not to turn our backs metaphorically on Western epistemologies, as 'decolonial' theorists like Walter Mignolo and Catherine Walsh might have us do (2018). Instead, the answer is to propose a strong translation framework that can take into account and also exceed the irreversible transformations wrought by colonialism. I acknowledge with Mignolo and others that modernity cannot be seen outside of colonialism. However, as I argue elsewhere, we need a theory of modernity that is not solely contained by colonialism (Niranjana, 2020). In order to develop this theory, we would have to take on board what is happening in activist domains like the women's movement and in cultural performative domains (my example is from Indian classical music, as argued in Niranjana, 2020). For decades we have been admitting to a need to close the gap between social science vocabulary (which is largely in English) and the languages of cultural forms, practices, and institutions. While small initiatives are continually being proposed, there has as yet been no large-scale multi-pronged effort to tackle this problem. That is, no effort that has behind it an informed theory of translation.

The language issue has also surfaced frequently in the women's movement of the last four decades. Urban activist groups of the 1970s and 1980s, for example, struggled with the task of defining the focus of their activism, since their constituencies included women from non-English-speaking backgrounds. Like several other issues which seemed divisive, the language question too was not directly addressed in the heady days of feminist activism in the 1980s and 1990s. Today in the new kind of social media hypervisibility of feminist issues, and a new sense of universalism, the language question seems to have gone under again.

In the last two decades, minority women in India (Muslim and Christian, for example) and Dalit women have been articulating their dissatisfaction with the subject positions offered to them by feminism. Interestingly, linguistic differences, often standing in for differences of other kinds, are being actively foregrounded. There are increasingly larger numbers of non-English-speaking women who have come to the women's movement through their involvement in other political and social movements or through

literary debates in the different languages. These women access feminist modes of analysis *in the regional languages*, either translated from English or local languages or written originally in those languages.

It is largely from this non-English feminist space that the demand for translation is being raised at present. However, one cannot accede to the demand by providing literal translations of material already available in English. Instead, the challenge would be to create a conceptual context in the local language and let the translation emerge through that context. Trying to meet such a challenge would force the feminist to reconceptualise her subjectivity as one formed in translation, and to realise how her questions and agendas are shaped and re-shaped continually in the space between the languages that she inhabits.

With such an awareness of living in translation, if we return to our discussion of the culture–gender conjuncture, it might become evident that feminist criticism of 'our' culture often amounted to a denunciation of it in the name of modernity. The leverage for this argument was provided by a universalist liberal humanism, which took shape through the apparatus of 'English'. The proponents of gender equality therefore took hold of English as their weapon, abandoning the culture question to the nationalists. That is the framework within which the culture–gender problem continues to be addressed. The contemporary challenge to English in the women's movement could then be read as a challenge to the settled way of dealing with the culture–gender nexus. The irony here is that urban women's groups have seen 'culture' (under which we group those aspects of Indian life we would rather leave behind) as a non-urban, non-English problem. By contrast, I am trying to argue that it is from that latter constituency that the real questioning of the culture–gender fit arises. What is interesting is that the question does not arise through direct problematisation of the production of (Indian) culture as women's domain but through the demand for translation as well as the scrutiny of English dominance.

It goes without saying that I don't refer to translation simply as an activity of putting what is expressed in one language into another language but an activity that has to perform self-consciously several levels of mediation. In our context, a good deal of conceptual work has been happening over the last century in the Indian languages even if not in a systematic fashion. The creation of a shared critical vocabulary recognisable across the country's many languages should now be at the forefront of our agendas for the twenty-first century.

The Question of Pedagogy

In this section I deal with questions of pedagogy in relation to culture and gender, beginning with a brief look at the legacy of how we have been addressing

this confluence in the classroom. I draw on my experience of teaching women's studies/gender studies as well as cultural studies in largely urban settings, where the language issue or the refusal of English was not a crucial part of how we talked about culture and gender.

In the early 1990s I was teaching women's studies as an optional course for humanities and social science students at a public university. The course was aimed at postgraduate students, since in those early years of globalisation all the undergraduates were still in their colleges and not on the university campus. The times were politically volatile. We were carrying forward the legacy of the 1980s women's movement and participating in the ongoing debates of the 1990s around caste and religious identity which had been the focus of major political upheavals of the time. Raising culture questions in the women's studies classroom was a spirited activity undertaken by the students, and – as in many Asian contexts – formulating appraisals of 'our culture' from a feminist perspective was an absorbing task. But although these 'budding feminists', as the students called themselves, attempted cultural critique in the interests of women, they often succumbed to an implicit universalism that made them impatient or irritable with their specific social contexts and their constraints.

This, then, was the tension that revealed itself: although women's studies brought up the question of culture, it was seen as antithetical to that modernity of which feminism was a part. When instead we begin to see the culture question as caught up in how we think about our modernity, we should also re-examine the ways in which gender perspectives deal with culture. Before we do this, we need to look critically at the apparent successes of gender sensitisation initiatives.

In the undergraduate and postgraduate humanities–social sciences classroom in India, the effects produced by the mainstreaming of gender questions are quite visible. This mainstreaming has been made possible by women's movement activism; the academic success of women's studies; and the universalising of rights issues since the second world war both by international agencies and by newly independent nation-states. The success of gender mainstreaming, however, can appear somewhat paradoxical. Students have begun to treat the analysis of certain crucial aspects of women's subordination as self-evident because they have been rendered visible through established pedagogy. For a new generation of women that has benefited from the struggles of the women's movement, the social and political concerns of an earlier generation are being seen as out dated. The curricula which deal with feminist theory and the women's movement have a pall of obsolescence over them, especially for young people disconnected from the history upon which the curricula draw.

What then is the validity of existing critiques of culture–gender formations in the present? Is the pressure exerted by demands for normative femininity as crucial as it used to be for my generation? How do women today see their

futures; do they see them as in any way constrained by the fact of their being women? We should also keep in mind the widespread analyses of secularism and modernity discourses, which have their own impact on thinking about gender.

If feminist scholarship has to reinvigorate the classroom, it should find new modes of engagement with the present-day histories of women and of gendering. I suggest that this should be done through re-investigating the culture–gender problematic, to see whether the alignment of women with 'culture' is still relevant for today. I further suggest that the re-investigation proceed by way of addressing the issues of language and translation, in particular since the translation question is being raised by non-Anglophone women claiming feminist subject positions without feeling any compulsion to answer the charge of 'Westernisation'. Not being bound by this charge also makes it less difficult for this group to worry about being associated with 'Indian culture'.

The Question of Decolonisation

Delinking the discussion about culture and gender from its established reference points (colonialism, difference, distinctiveness) need not mean a return to pre-colonial cultural possibilities, but instead a focusing on the translated and translating present. We in the non-Western world are perpetually experiencing a 'lack of fit' between what Partha Chatterjee (1998) called the language of capital and the language of community. If some of us are preoccupied with the violence of modernity, others are obsessed with the violence of community. If, according to some, modernity is the solution to the tyranny of community, there are others who think that the solidarity of community helps us overcome modernity's horrors. My own position is that there is no 'outside' of modernity and that acts of translation are part of our necessary negotiations with both modernity and community. However, the translator–feminist has to position herself within the space to be criticised to earn the right to criticise. For this positioning to work, we have to understand the historical construction of our feminist agency – its existence in translation, its excess, its supplementarity. Only thus can we engage with the multiple languages of our political present.

Let me now point to the difference between those who see feminism as part of the discourse of secularism and modernity and those who see the identity of women as belonging firmly to a community, a term used in India to refer to religious identity. Feminists have usually acted as though their agency can be fully translated into the language of the Enlightenment. Their critics have rested their case on what they see as the untranslatability of the 'authentic Indian'. So you have here an opposition between transparency and untranslatability. Curiously, both of these are modern positions.

What, then, of political agency and the feminist problems with language in India? The language of rights and humanism or universalism makes a certain demand for transparency. By aligning with this language, the secular feminist's subject formation is placed above scrutiny, and her complicity with the exclusionary project of Indian modernism made invisible.

How does the feminist forge a vocabulary for political engagement that doesn't take the easy way out by adopting an existing language? Let me offer some ideas through a series of propositions that explore different aspects of being *in translation*:

- the postcolonial political scenario has to be understood in all its instability;
- the problematic of translation can illuminate postcolonial political subjectivity;
- emphasising 'translation' is to draw attention to the interpretive processes that are constantly at work in our context to make representation possible;
- insisting on the condition of 'in-translatedness' takes into account (a) our historical situation as political actors, (b) the complexities of our location, and (c) our multiple negotiations with these complexities;
- this way we can refuse the burden of having to be 'authentic' and reframe the problem as one of the locatedness or connectedness of our politics rather than one of being simply Indian or Western;
- political agency in the non-Western world need not be that of a unified self whose coherence is produced by its linguistic being and its occupation of the world authenticated by its language;
- we can instead see the political subject as one compelled to straddle two or more languages while not being fully governed by any one of them.

In conclusion, I want to emphasise two things. First, the reference points for culture and gender have long been colonial difference and distinctiveness, as I mentioned in the previous section. When feminism in India foregrounds the translation question, it challenges colonial discourse by de-essentialising both culture and gender, thus contributing to the broader process of decolonisation. Second, which is a related point, is the value of being *in translation*, which is how I propose we look at the subject of a critical feminism. As we strive to create a more reflexive political vocabulary, we need to acknowledge the importance of moving in and out of languages, of being always between languages, indeed the importance of translation – as a way of keeping open the space of criticism and therefore of change.

Note

1 See https://pinjratod.wordpress.com/, https://feminisminindia.com/, and www.newslaundry.com/author/the-ladies-finger.

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5

ON TRANSLATION IDEOLOGY

Abdelmajid Hannoum

Since the publication of the first English translation of Walter Benjamin's essay as 'The Task of the Translator' in 1968, translation studies has become a vibrant field. Scholars, especially literary scholars, have used Benjamin's text to explore questions of translation and its episteme(s), as well as practical questions of specific texts and their translatability. Translation seems to centre on a paradox that may be the origin of its epistemic richness. On the one hand, translation is impossible considering that a translated text is only a replica: that is, not the text itself. Yet on the other hand, this textual impossibility does not prevent the task from being doable. Translation is impossible but at the same time feasible (Ricœur, 1999, 8–19).

That a translation is impossible yet feasible starts with Benjamin's text itself, written originally in German, as an introduction to a translation of Charles Baudelaire's poems, *Les fleurs du mal*. The English-language version of Benjamin's text was heuristic. It has created an impressive textual fecundity of translation. Few scholars of translation have referred to, let alone discussed, the German text.[1] Thus, the field of translation studies itself seems to have been founded on a translated text that claims, as its fundamental idea, the impossibility of translation yet, at the same time, demonstrates that it is doable.

Another interesting problem is that this text was originally the preface to a set of poems translated by Benjamin himself. However, in translation studies, 'The Task of the Translator' stands by itself as a theoretical text on translation. One can, or rather should, interrogate the semiotic status of the text as a preface, both in the German text and in English or any other language. It is also important to explore how that text was not only a meta-discourse of the translator for explaining his thoughts on the translation of the poems but

DOI: 10.4324/9781003351986-6

also a text that explains, justifies, and even sanctions the very process of translation. By itself, the text shows that a preface is often, and most likely always, part of a translation. This begs the question: why does a translation need a preface? The first answer would be that a translation needs a preface to explain the choice of the text of the translation, to introduce its author, to clarify certain concepts, to address the difficulties of translation, and so forth. However, we can also ask: can a translation stand by itself? Surely it does anyway, even when there is a preface, because how many people read the introduction to a translation? Yet, how many scholars have read Benjamin's text (even in English) without reading the translation of the poems it precedes?

It is here that I would like to intervene to demonstrate that a translation, precisely because it is impossible yet doable, always needs a preface to address the doable impossibility. After all, this is the main theme of Benjamin's preface. Yet, in addressing this doable impossibility, the preface becomes a fundamental part of the translation itself; it contributes significantly to the making of a translation ideology, one that convinces readers that they are reading Proust (not his translator), Hegel (not his translator), or Ibn Khaldûn (and not his translator). For, obviously, there is a key difference between Proust and his translator(s), Hegel and his translator(s), Ibn Khaldûn and his translator(s).[2] I hope to explore the concept of translation ideology as the set of ideas inherent in any project of translation and constituting the cognitive universe of any translator. Without this, translation would not be doable. Second, I will explore the issue of the preface and its function in reinforcing, rationalising, and justifying the existence and conditioning the reading (interpretation) of the translated text.

The examples I discuss all relate to coloniality/decoloniality. One is a text that was translated during the colonial period, *L'Histoire des Berbères* written by Ibn Khaldûn, translated by William de Slane, and published by the French Ministry of War in 1852 (Hannoum, 2003, 61–81). The other text was also written during the colonial period, by Frantz Fanon, and was translated into English twice: in 1963 by Constance Farrington and in 2004/1961 by Richard Philcox. Homi K. Bhabha wrote the preface for the 2004/1961 translation. I include in my discussion the 2012 Arabic translation and its prefaces in order to contrast the translation ideology of the Arabic translation with that of the 2004/1961 English translation. This comparison will shed light on how, in each of these instances, the preface (also referred to as a foreword, or in Arabic 'kalima') plays a role – or refuses to participate – in an epistemic decolonisation. I hope to demonstrate that the concept of translation ideology I elaborate works towards unmasking coloniality in texts that may apparently appear anti-colonial, or even decolonial. I also hope this concept is heuristic, such that it is operational in all types of translation, colonial or not.

What Is a Translation Ideology?

I develop the concept of translation ideology from the concept of linguistic ideology that was elaborated a few decades ago to distinguish between a given language as it is practised and the ensemble of ideas that conceptualise that language (Woolard and Shieffelin, 1994, 55–82). Language ideology is understood as the 'set of beliefs about language articulated by users as rationalisation or justification of perceived language structure and use' (Silverstein, 1976, 193). Since translation is, after all, a linguistic process involving the use of language, we cannot separate it from language ideology more broadly. However, translation ideology consists of a set of beliefs about the linguistic process of translation itself. It not only rationalises a perceived language structure and use but also rationalises or justifies a cognitive operation involving the transformation of language and, through it, narratives or discourses. We need to distinguish between translation as a linguistic performance (commanded by a double linguistic competence) and translation ideology as the ensemble of ideas that conceptualise, rationalise, and justify the translation practice.

Every translation presupposes a conception of translation, however elementary or developed that concept may be. Moreover, all translated knowledge is informed by a conception (i.e. theory), elementary or developed, of translation. Every translation is the result of a theory (i.e. a general understanding) of the craft of translation. This theory (set of abstract ideas) shapes the production of translated knowledge. This explains, in large part, the multiplicity of translations in one given language of the same book, which is a textual phenomenon seen especially among books considered paramount. Now, how is translation ideology different from linguistic ideology?

Translation ideology is different from linguistic ideology yet connected to it since translation involves language. However, because translation ideology pertains to the production of textual objects in a given language, the produced object obeys both the ideological constraints of that language and the ideological views of the translator (on language, on translation, on the texts to translate). How does the translator understand general translation? How do they interpret and articulate new ideas in their language? How do they construct a new object that emerges within a cultural landscape itself traversed by ideology? These are general questions about any form of translation, literary or not, academic or not. Nevertheless, translation of non-literary forms, including the academic literary form, offers different challenges. The academic discourse is marked, as Roland Barthes notes, by 'a fabric of quotations' (1984, 3). By definition, it is intertextual. Its intertextuality is not only made of a fabric of quotations, but these quotations in and of themselves also contain what I call a system of references, explicit or implicit, that gives the text its expression and its content – as well as its authority and its credibility.

In an academic translation, the original text is always a Barthesian 'fabric of quotations', with its own specific system of references. The translator faces an original text, whose fabric may already exist in translation, its references constituted differently, within a discursive formation. Often, this fabric already exists in (other) translations. The fact that some of the quotations, with their system of references, already exist in (other) translations, incorporated in the text *ad quem*, makes the translation itself *inter-transtextual*. This is to say that if all texts are intertextual, then all translations are *inter-translational* in their textuality.

Translating is a process of semantic transformation guided by theoretical choices and decisions. Translation is reflexive. The choices are not merely theoretical or abstract but are rather ideological in the sense that they pertain to a set of ideas (idea-logy) about the nature of language and translation, regarding the nature of semantic transformation. The first fundamental transformation of a translation occurs as the translator moves from one semantic (i.e. cognitive) universe to another, say from English to French or from French into Arabic, Hebrew, or Persian. Since a language, in the Whorfian sense, is not only a means of communication but also a means of signifying the world, of establishing relations, of expressing worldviews, a transition from one language to another is a change in the signification of the world, the dynamics of relations, and the difference of worldviews (Whorf, 1956, 235).

However, to finesse the process of translation, one needs to see what constitutes a language as a system of signs. The dichotomy articulated by Ferdinand de Saussure – that language is made of a signifier (being the graphic or phonic system) and the signified (being the ideas or concepts) – found its most elaborate formulation in the work of Louis Hjelmslev (1968). This Danish linguist distinguishes the form of the signifier (which he calls expression) from its substance. He also distinguishes the form of the signified (which he calls the content) from its substance. In Hjelmslev's footsteps, Algirdas Julien Greimas takes this distinction from the level of the phrase – the smallest unit for linguistic analysis – to the level of the narrative (and by extension the discourse), the basic unit for semiotics and discourse analysis (Greimas, 1966, 1979). Thus, a narrative too has an expression and a substance, each made of form and content. Translation is, of course, a transformation at all these levels, but the transformation of the substance of the content and its forms is undoubtedly substantial. These transformations not only touch the substance of the content (i.e. semantics), but they also touch the grammatical syntax (the set of actors, actants, and objects one finds in a narrative and even in the discourse of social science). The grammatical syntax or the narrative grammar is the set of actants and actors that may seem to remain the same but often do not. For instance, an actor such as *l'arabe* in the French text of Franz Fanon is not the same as *the Arab* in the English language.

A translation is a passage from one cognitive universe to another. Each cognitive universe has its own categories, relations, power dynamics, vision of the world, and so forth. Each cognitive universe consists of a vast semantic field with a multiplicity of choices: what translators usually call equivalents. The translator often relies on an indispensable source for the search of equivalents: the dictionary, a cultural form ideologically constituted, constituting a semantic field socially and culturally constructed (Reig, 1993, 64–66). It is from within this semantic field that the translator constantly makes decisions. The decision of the translator is not gratuitous, but it is guided from beginning to end, from the choice (or the acceptance) of the project of translation to the last-minute editing when some decisions about 'equivalents' are negotiated, changed, or confirmed. Each change or conformation alters along the totality of the elements of the text. These processes can be found in the work of translators who challenge power structures as well as translators who confirm them. The outlined functions can pertain to decolonial cognitive acts as well as to colonial or neo-colonial ones.

Some of the decisions of the translator are intentional. Choosing a text to translate or accepting a project of translation is often the first conscious decision. This choice carries with it the idea that the text in question is worth translating, that it is translatable, and that the translator possesses all the modalities of translation competence, which go beyond the double linguistic competence to include competence in a fully fledged theory of translation. Not all bilingual people are translators. Indeed, to be a translator (like Benjamin himself), one needs to know the craft of translation and the ideas and practices of translation, and one needs to hold the belief that translations are doable, even if impossible. The craft of translation, with its dynamics, its ruses, the knowledge of its technicalities, informs the translator's linguistic decisions relating to what I have called translation ideology.

Some of the decisions a translator makes are subconscious. Certain equivalents may seem natural to the translator, even as the act of translating seems natural and automatic. Take as an example one of the greatest translations in the history of Orientalism, the translation of a portion of the history of Ibn Khaldûn (1852–56), called the '*Ibar*, into French under the title, *L'Histoire des Berbères*. It is undoubtedly a subconscious act of translation to translate *barbar* into *Berbères* (or '*arab* as *Arabes*); these equivalents seem self-evident, yet the first is not the second. As a narrative grammar, *Berbère* were already constituted as a colonial category with specific constellations of meaning that include opposition to yet another Orientalist category called '*Arabes*' (Hannoum, 2003, 61–81). Yet, in the original, '*barbar*' is a category with different constellations of meaning, constructed across the preceding ages to mean, in the time of Ibn Khaldûn, a people, made up of tribes, with a glorious history intertwined with those of others, on the tribal level as well as on dynastical ones, including, and maybe most importantly, Berber tribes (Hannoum,

2003). In other words, since Ibn Khaldûn uses the term *jîl* to speak of each generation, *barbar* or *'arab* constantly change. In the French translation, the concept of *jîl* is rendered as race, thus reproducing the racial ideology of French colonialism. The same goes for the term *'arab*; it is not the same as *arabes* – a French Orientalist category with meaning not found in the text of Ibn Khaldûn (Hannoum, 2003). Similarly, when Frantz Rosenthal (1958) translates the Muqaddimah of Ibn Khaldûn, he clearly uses the French translation of the same work by de Slane; he translates *jîl* as *race*, and *'arab* as *Arabes*, and *barbar* as *Berber*. *Arabs* and *Berbers* are all categories found in Anglo-American Orientalism.[3]

Omissions in translation also pertain to translation ideology. The decision to omit may be informed by the idea that the equivalent is absent. For example, the racist term *bicot* in French is omitted in an English translation of Franz Fanon published in 2004, making the translation free from the isotopy of symbolic violence that constitutes the foundation of physical violence in the colonial setting (Hannoum, 2023). Another translator may not omit *lexemes* in translation and may instead add a note either explaining the difficulty of this translation or giving an explanation of the term and a justification of the chosen equivalent. Notes, clearly, are also significant interventions in a translation that reveal, if only partially, the underlying translation ideology.

Informed decisions about translation are not only found in the choice of equivalents or the decision to omit or to footnote, but they are also found outside the process of translation itself. Ideology precedes the translation. For instance, why would Richard Philcox decide to translate a text, *Les damnés de la terre*, which had already been translated? The choice itself is ideological. Believing that an existing translation, despite its popularity, is inadequate implies a fundamental disagreement with the meaning it conveys. It also implies disagreement with the ideology of the text. Similarly, when Philcox chooses to translate *phénomène* as *event* (in a departure from the first English-language translator, Constance Farrington, who, in her edition of 1963, chose *phenomenon*), the choice is an ideological one and not only linguistic. This marks the start of a different transformation of the text that is ideologically consistent throughout. Translating a *phenomène* as an *event* in the first sentence of *Les damnés de la terre* by Franz Fanon is undoubtedly a conscious decision guided by an ideology of globalism that underscores the idea(logy) that decolonisation is no longer a phenomenon of the present to be seen and perceived as a process, but an 'event' of the past, with a beginning and an end, followed by the new age of globalisation, the one that constitutes the present (Hannoum, 2023). Finally, when Philcox chooses (or accepts) that Homi K. Bhabha write a foreword, that in itself is an ideological decision. Could he or his publisher have approached Louis Gordon? A preface by Louis Gordon for the 2004 edition, assuming he would agree to

write it, would have revealed a different translation ideology. Such an ideology would surely have been incongruent with the translation by Philcox. Gordon, as a decolonial scholar of the Caribbean, may not think that Fanon needs rescuing, that his text is dead, or that his views on decolonisation are no longer relevant to the political present.[4] On the contrary, for him, as for other decolonial scholars, Fanon's text remains highly relevant because decolonisation is a process still ongoing in the present, not an event of the past.

For decolonial translation, the concept of translation ideology allows us to interrogate the ideological transformation a translated text undergoes. It allows the reader to pay attention not just to the equivalents and their adequacy but also to the fact that translators are not neutral in their translations. Hence, because of the ubiquity of coloniality in a postcolonial world, a translator may not be neutral or even free from the colonial. A scholar of translation ought to know the mechanisms by which a translated text carries with it meanings that may be colonial or decolonial, that permeate the translated text. This is, in and of itself, a decolonial approach.

What Is a Translator?

In a well-known essay, 'What Is an Author?' Michel Foucault argues that an author is a function (1969, 73–104). We can equally ask, what is a translator? Is a translator an author? If so, what is the status of the original author in translation? If not, then what is the status of the translator? Is a translated text to be signed by the original author or by the translator? If the author is a function, what is the status of the translator? Can the translator also be an author function? If so, what are the conditions under which this function is possible?

Many authors are unable to read themselves in a specific translation, and those who can may not identify themselves with the translated text.[5] This might happen even when authors translate themselves. Hence the question, directly answered by Benjamin, as to whether a translation is a creation in and of itself. It is obviously not identical to the original text, but not separate from it either. Yet, the translation, in public understanding, is authored by the author, and often the translator is not recognised. We still believe that the author of *The Phenomenology of the Spirit* is Hegel and the author of the *Muqaddimah* is Ibn Khaldûn, and that both Jean Hyppolite and Frantz Rosenthal are only translators. This is despite the fact that perhaps Hegel would be unable to recognise himself in the French translation of Jean Hyppolite; nor, evidently, would Ibn Khaldûn be able to read himself in the English translation of Franz Rosenthal.

The first thing to notice is that a text always lends itself to several translations in the same language (i.e. Hegel, Ibn Khaldûn, Marx, Nietzsche, Proust, the Bible, and the Quran).[6] This is only possible because during the process of translation, translators themselves navigate vast semantic universes in which

to choose 'equivalents'. The choice of equivalents is itself guided by a translation ideology. For instance, in the translation of *Les damnés de la terre*, the translator of 1963 might not have felt that *phénomène* has an equivalent other than *phenomenon*. By contrast, the translator of 2004 must have felt its equivalent is *event*. In the first instance, the translator shares the ideology of Fanon's text. In the second instance, the translator, writing in the context of globalisation, shares the ideology of globalisation, and its main premise that it is a new order and, ipso facto, decolonisation is over, precluded as it is by its successor.

The translator, using a text signed by the author, creates an avatar text, if only because now we have two: *Les damnés de la terre* and *The Wretched of the Earth*. One exists within a specific intellectual landscape where academic circles tend to ignore it; the other evolves within a different intellectual landscape where it circulates extensively, becoming one of the foundational texts in postcolonial studies, a field often dismissed in France (Mbembe, 2011; Hannoum, 2019). Therefore, the author of the avatar, the ghost author, becomes an author in his own right. The textual career of his product may overtake the original author in its power of generating a discursive formation (for example, the French Foucault and the English Foucault, the French Fanon and the English Fanon). Another avatar, that is, another translation in a different language, may not achieve the same importance (Fanon in Arabic is not as important as Fanon in English) for socio-historical reasons (Ben Badis speaks more to the Algerians than Fanon, and FLN manifestos and statements make Fanon appear less original to the Algerians).[7]

The translator is indeed an author, whose conditions of emergence and discourse function within a discursive formation. Even categories and schemas of thought are quite different in the translation than those of the original author, the producer of the initial text. They are not identical, as the original text, obviously, is never identical to the translated one. Yet in all of this, the translator – whose choices, words, translation ideology, style, and rendering of meaning can be seen and read in the new text – is not considered an author and often their name is forgotten (who can instantly remember the translator of *The Archaeology of Knowledge* or *The Phenomenology of the Spirit* or *Phenomenology of Perception*?). Yet the translator does not only operate at a purely linguistic level devoid of ideology.

The basis, or rather the point of departure, of any translation is interpretation, that the translator is first a reader, an interpreter before she is a translator (i.e. a producer of a new text within a specific language). A text lends itself to different interpretations, readings that may be markedly different from one another, and these interpretations are themselves shaped by a reader ideology. A Marxist would undoubtedly understand *Das Kapital* in ways drastically different from an anti-Marxist. Consequently, and because interpretation is the basis of a translation, the difference is that the translator

is, in addition to being a reader, an author or at least a ghost author of some sort; that is, a producer of a text that the original author may disagree with, and may not even be able to read.

However, these discursive dynamics are often invisible in a translation. While reading a translation, one is convinced that one is reading the original author, not a translator. But this epistemic invisibility is always, or at least often, made visible in prefaces to translations that are as pivotal to the translation as the translation is to itself, meaning they are part and parcel of the same semiotic object we call the text of translation, be it *The Wretched of the Earth*, the *Muqaddimah*, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, or any other text.

The Preface and Translation Ideology

Prefaces are common in translations. Most, if not all, translations are prefaced either by the translators themselves or by other authors. Why does a translation need to be prefaced, especially considering that translatability is always part of the translation ideology? The latter is the idea that the translator is not inventing anything but only transmitting a message, or rather a text, from a given language to another language. What does it mean to have a preface to a work of translation? Is it necessary? What is the function of a preface? What do prefaces achieve?

My argument, which I shall develop in the present section, is that the preface not only introduces the translated text, but it also, and often, reinforces the translation ideology of a text. Of course, a preface can also challenge the translation ideology of the text; it can even hijack it. Prefaces to translations are part of the entire economy of the translated text. Let us ask first: what is a preface? What is the semiotic status of a preface? What is the function of a preface? And, of course, what is the meaning (i.e. ideology) that a preface bestows on a text that it aims to interpret – and thus guide the reader's interpretation, or better yet, condition that interpretation? As a text, the preface aims to convince the readers of a specific interpretation of what they are about to read.

Initially, a preface to a translation appears as a meta-discourse, like any other preface. It is a reflection on the translation, an often positive evaluation of another semiotic object that is the translated text. The first clarification to make is between a preface and an introduction; they may at times be synonymous, but often there is a crucial distinction to be made between the two. Jacques Derrida draws attention to this distinction when he writes:

> The introduction has a more systematic, less historical, less circumstantial link with the logic of the book. It is unique; it deals with general and essential architectonic problems; it presents the general concept in its division and self-differentiation. The Prefaces, on the other hand, are multiplied

> from edition to edition and take into account a more empirical historicity; they obey an occasional necessity.
>
> (1981, 17)

Derrida adds that the introduction is part of the system articulated in the corpus; the preface, by contrast, is a meta-thought about the text, it is exterior to the text (1981, 15). It usually takes the form of a meta-discourse on the text produced (Greimas, 1983, 29). Because it is situated outside the text, it is considered at the threshold of knowledge (Schaeffer, 1987, 36–44). This does not mean that the preface is devoid of information (i.e. knowledge), but devoid of philosophical knowledge; outside of the philosophical system, it can only repeat and clarify without adding to it. Derrida calls it 'the site of a kind of chit-chat external to the very thing it appears to be talking about' (1981, 10).

In this discussion, the focus seems to be on a preface that an author writes for their own work. One needs also to interrogate the status of a preface written not by the author but by someone else. Such a preface is usually solicited, often as an intellectual favour. The function always seems to be that such a preface (usually by a famous author, a respected authority, almost never by an obscure figure) on the work of a less famous one is to endorse the text and, in so doing, to bestow upon it the authority of a weighty name, often also a celebrity in the field. This is the case of Sartre prefacing Fanon. There is also the opposite case when an author, relatively known, arguably important, prefaces a work of an author, significantly more known and unarguably important. The effect is to reflect some of the importance of the famous author on the less well known; if only the two names are now forever associated in a book, the association puts them in the same league even though they may not be. This is the case of Homi Bhabha with Fanon, and with Sartre. Hence, in the translation of 2004, the three names are juxtaposed: Fanon, Sartre, and Bhabha. With his foreword, Bhabha's name has become linked to the names of two major philosophers in a translation of a text considered particularly foundational in colonial and postcolonial studies. This association, of course, intends to elevate him to their levels of intellectual authority or at least to situate him intellectually in relation to the given text and its authors, Fanon and Sartre.

Bhabha does not seem to have access to the French text (2004, xii). Therefore, his preface cannot comment on the translation (how the text passed from one language to another) as prefaces often do. Nevertheless, Bhabha's preface remains a meta-discourse on the English version. What does it say about this English text that still bears the name of Fanon? First, it rather clearly assumes the text in English is Fanon's. It is not. Fanon wrote in French, and the English translation of 2004/1961 is created by Philcox out of the French text. In other words, Philcox renders *Les damnés de la terre* (i.e. interprets

and rewrites) in English. However, Philcox was in the presence of two texts, both of which bear the name of Fanon: a French text and an already existing text in English (i.e. the translation of Farrington). He dismisses the latter and claims his text a substitute of the first (if only in English). The prefacer accepts this, if only tacitly. There is then a complicity between the translator and the prefacer to make the reader believe that they are reading Fanon, not Philcox, and that Philcox, not Farrington, is the 'real' Fanon. Needless to say, Fanon can be read only in French. In English, the reader is in the presence of another text, with a different semantics, the product of translation ideology.

Let me now contrast two prefaces to different translations of the same work: *Les damnés de la terre*, (re)translated in 2004 with a preface (called a foreword) by Homi Bhabha, and *Les damnés de la terre*, translated into Arabic by Sami al-Duruni and Jamal al-Atasi, with two prefaces. Of course, the preface cannot be separated from the translation if only because it constitutes part of the same translation ideology. Consequently, to examine the preface, it is imperative to take the translation itself into account, and see the dynamics by which it transforms the original and makes it conform to the interpretation of the translator, which is itself shaped by translation ideology (Hannoum, 2023, 64–84).

The Arabic translation was published in the context of the so-called Arab Spring, in 2012, under the title *al-Mu'adhabun fi al-ard* and the subtitle *wa yalih mulhaq ghiyab al-bu'ad al-islami fi nusus fanon: al-islam al-maskut 'anh fi kitab mu'adh-dhibu al-ard* (followed by an appendix (mulhaq) written by Fouzi Slisli called *Ghiyâb al-bu ʿd al-islâmî fî nuṣûṣ fânûn; al-islâm al-maskût ʿanh fî kitâb al-muʿadh-dhabûn fi al-arḍ* [On the absence of the Islamic dimension in the texts of Fanon; Islam, the Unspoken about in the "The Wretched of the Earth"])(Fanon, 2012). In Arabic the title itself announces the translation ideology, as not only the title evokes the *seme* of torture (*'adhâb* in Arabic), but it also adds its own subtitle evoking the *seme* of incompleteness (absence of Islam) in the work of Fanon. The explicitness of the translation ideology even in the title contrasts with the subtlety of Bhabha in his foreword, which in itself evokes a movement towards the future, consistent with the main theme of his discourse. Yet the Arabic text is even more pronounced as regards its translation ideology in an epigraph placed also at the outset of the translation, a verse from the Quran, '*walladhîna jâhadu fina lanahdiyahdiyyanahum subulana wa inna Allâh ma'a al-muhsinîn*' ('But as for those who strive hard in Our cause – We shall most certainly guide them onto paths that lead unto Us: for, behold, God is indeed with the doers of good') (Quran, 839).

As I have noted, Bhabha's preface Bhabha assumes the age of decolonisation is over and interrogates Fanon (or more specifically the translation of 2004/1961) to show (i.e. argue) that his work does not speak to our time, but that some of it can be 'salvaged'. The anonymous preface of the Arabic translation shows (i.e. argues) that Fanon's text (in Arabic) speaks

to our time, is urgently relevant, and that there is everything to learn from it in the context of the Arab Spring.

Bhabha writes: 'In my view, *The Wretched of the Earth* does indeed allow us to look well beyond the immediacies of its anticolonial context – the Algerian war of independence and the African context – toward a critique of the configurations of contemporary globalization' (2004, xiii). He goes on to ask: 'what might be saved from Fanon's ethics and politics of decolonisation to help us reflect on globalisation in our sense of the term' (Bhabha, 2004, xiii). This echoes the idea of the dead text found in the translator's afterword: 'I felt I had to bring a dead translation back to life' (Philcox, 2004, 250). Bhabha's question about 'what might be saved' clearly indicates that not all could be saved; there is also what cannot be saved. If a text is a body, only parts of which can be saved, it means that prefacers sets as a goal for themselves to save the text from a total death. The goal of the prefacer and the translator align, albeit only to a certain extent. One attempts to save it intellectually, that is, by an interpretation to adjust it to the present; the other attempts a translation 'to modernize the text and look ahead' (Philcox, 2004, 250).

The Arabic translation has two 'prefaces'.[8] One is by the publisher, called *kalimat* (a 'word' but, semiotically, it has the status of a preface). The second is anonymous; it is unclear whether it was written by the translators or by someone else. The anonymous one is more substantial than the first preface, and its own anonymity makes it read as an independent 'truth' that does not need an author. However, both insert themselves in the book whose author is Fanon. Both are thus part of the translation, and as such they participate in its semantic economy, including, of course, its translation ideology. The preface by the publishing house named Al-Markaz states:

> This book [pertains to] the relation between the coloniser and the colonised, on how to start revolutions from the bottom, how to protect revolutions from the interferences of colonialism and the local elites submitted to it. However, after more than a half century after these revolutions, we consider that the colonial conditions have not changed much. What has happened in truth is that there was an exchange of direct colonialism, with its financial and human costs, with a local colonialism, less costly, and totally under the yoke of the old colonialism.
>
> (in Fanon, 2012, 7)

Unlike the preface of the English translation of 2004, the Arabic preface does not claim to 'salvage' the original text, nor does it argue that it lost part of its relevance to the present. On the contrary, it argues that the text is of the utmost importance and even urgency to Arab countries in the present. It is that same urgency that makes, according to this translation ideology, the translation necessary in the context of Arab revolutions.

At its outset, the preface inscribes the text in the context of the Arab revolutions and stresses the relevance of the translation to the present. However, to the Arab audience, it connects the reader to a 'lived reality', not only because the text speaks to the situation of Algeria, but also because it speaks to the situation of coloniser versus colonised, a dichotomy interiorised by the audience, that exists outside the Algerian colonial context. Even if the Arabic translators render phenomenon as *hadath* (i.e. event), the event for the Arab reader appears continuous. Not only it is continuous, by its own conception, but also because there is a largely common conception that French domination continues unabated in the region, despite the so-called independence.[9] The Arab revolutions of 2011 were themselves attempts at decolonisation that may be dormant but are not finished.

The main idea found in the translation of 2004 is that decolonisation is a past event, with insights to be found (by the scholar) to help read globalisation as the subsequent historical development. By contrast, the preface of the Arab translation states the opposite, that few things have changed since colonialism and that the situation is rather the same as the new elite takes on the role of the old colonial elite, with more efficiency and at less cost. Bhabha assumes that Fanon needs readjustment to become relevant to the era of globalisation. In his effort of interpretation, Bhabha buries Fanon and somehow replaces him as the author of the present. The Arabic translation makes no such claims and instead claims that Fanon is urgently relevant, alive, and insightful in the present, which is still one of decolonisation.

The Arabic preface, with no author, speaks a clearly nationalistic language. Precisely because it has no author, it systematically uses the term 'we' to refer to the Arab peoples, not only the Algerians. If the first preface claims the relevance of Fanon to the present, the second demonstrates this relevance through its own ideological reading of Fanon in relation to the current question of Arab unity, central to the ideology of Arab nationalism. It presents the translation as a textbook in revolutions.

What can we conclude? That the English preface is scholarly, and the Arabic preface is not? The first is analytical, and the second and the third are ideological? The status of all these prefaces are the same: they are metadiscourses; interpretations of a text (in English for Bhabha, in Arabic for the unnamed prefacers) in relation to a present they read differently, for specific reasons. For Bhabha it is the discourse of globalisation (or globalism) articulated from within a powerful educational institution; for the Arab prefacers it is the discourse of nationalism, pronounced from within an obscure Arab nationalist centre. The first assumes decolonisation is over and posits the existence of a post-decolonisation commonly called 'contemporary globalisation'.[10] The second assumes decolonisation is still in progress and posits the Arab revolutions as its manifestations. Consequently, the first assumes the death of the text, while the second assumes the living text. Both, or rather

all three, prefaces have their own argumentation, their own logic, their own rigour, and thus their own truths. Nevertheless, it remains that these truths are equally, though differently, ideological, in that each is a discourse with a socio-historical function, an analysis of which is beyond the scope of this chapter.

Conclusion

Largely through the work of Benjamin, scholars of translation came to better understand that translation is not a replica of the original; it does not say exactly what is said in the original. Yet another vital task is to examine in what way a specific translation changes by virtue of the very process of translation. In this chapter, I sought first to show that translation involves at least two languages, each with a vast and different semantic universe, itself containing a cognitive world culturally rooted and signifying in its own specific ways. Thus, a translation from one language to another is itself an ideological transition where categories of thought are replaced by an ideological decision. In doing so, they give meaning that is also culturally, and thus ideologically, rooted in a given society. However, translation ideology, as an analytical concept, accounts for the systematic choices, the omissions, the footnotes, the very process of translation (i.e. writing), the style of the translator, and even other extra-textual factors as well such as the preface and the choice of the prefacer. I argued that these choices are guided and shaped by the translation ideology, an epistemic subject produced in a society, educated by its institutions, in specific languages (themselves having language ideologies) and traversed by views about language, about the business of translation itself, and of course about political and cultural views. After all, at the basis of any translation, there is an act of interpretation, always ideologically conditioned.

However, it is undoubtedly rare to find a translation bereft of a preface. The preface, as a meta-discourse, not only provides information on the author, the translation or the original, the general context, or what have you. It is there as an important part of the economy of meaning of the entire translation, of which, despite its semiotic status, it constitutes one part, under the same title (for example, *The Wretched of the Earth*). The proof is the fact that these prefaces (or forewords) are also, often, written by other authors, who are sometimes not familiar with the original language of the translation.

Prefaces are, in fact, textual phenomena in translation. *The Wretched of the Earth* that came already with an original preface by Sartre was also endowed with a second preface in the translation of 2004. The preface by Bhabha confirms the translation ideology of the text, one that relegates the text to its past, denies it its urgent actuality, and reduces it to a text to be salvaged by 'cherry-picking' some ideas that may be relevant to globalisation.

In other words, the text along with its new preface is part of globalism and assumed to no longer speak to a decolonial situation considered past. The Arabic translation, along with its additional subtitle, epigraphs, and prefaces, expresses a very different translation ideology, one that, after 2011, shows that the text of Fanon is of the utmost relevance to the present marked by the event called the Arab revolutions, for which the text of Fanon ought to serve as a textbook in revolutions.

Finally, I hope to have demonstrated that decolonising cannot be only positive, in the sense that one lays bare the discursive mechanisms of the colonial to overcome it. On the contrary, decolonising can also involve reshaping an anti-colonial text, such as Fanon's, into a text conforming to a new ideology, however controversial it is. Decolonising can sometimes make explicit the coloniality of a text that may not appear so. For, indeed, a translated colonial text can transform so as to appear non-colonial, anti-colonial, or postcolonial. However, critical approaches, like the one I proposed in this chapter, can also contribute to decolonising translations.

Notes

1 I mean in English; the German text is discussed by a few, most notably Paul de Man (1985) and Carol Jacobs (1975).
2 I am thinking specifically of William de Slane's French (1851–56) and Frantz Rosenthal's English (1967) translations of Ibn Khaldûn.
3 This is the image of the Arab deconstructed in the seminal work of Edward Said. The Arab in the French colonial discourse is essentially the Algerian and by extension the Maghrebi defined as a part of another category which is Berber; the two found their epistemic justification in the French translation of Ibn Khaldûn. See Hannoum (2021, 123–169).
4 See some of his views on Fanon in his article (Gordon, 2019).
5 This is the case of Abdallah Laroui who disapproved of the Arabic translation of his book, *L'Histoire du Maghreb* and translated (or wrote it?) himself in Arabic. See his preface to his own translation, Laroui (1999).
6 As Carol Jacobs notes in 'The Monstrosity of Translation' (1975, 755), her criticism of Harry Zohn's translation of Benjamin, 'should be recognised more as a play between possible versions than as a claim to establish a more "correct" translation'.
7 See as an example the manifesto written by Hussein Ait Ahmed (1948).
8 *Al-Mu'adh-dhabûna fi al-ard*, p. 7. I would rather translate as *The Tortured of the Earth*. I am aware that my own translations are not free from ideology. However, this points out to the paradox of the impossibility yet doability of translation. This is a problem inherent in any type of representation regardless of the forms it takes.
9 In Algeria, the name *hizb fransa*, commonly used by youth, refers not only to parties that are seen as pro-French but also to what is called the generals, seen as protecting the interests of the French and referred to sometimes as *harki* (those Algerians who fought their own on the side of the French). In Morocco, there is less the myth of independence since the name used was 'independence in the interdependence'. Yet French hegemony is still felt strongly not only in the field of politics but also in the field of education (i.e. language and culture). In Tunisia, there is a dichotomy of secular versus Islamist, often interpreted as France versus

Islam. Beyond the Maghreb, Western hegemony is felt and seen militarily (i.e. the invasion of Iraq, bombing of Libya, interventions in Syria, the never-ending violent situation in Palestine). In the rest of Africa, the recent coups in Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso were cheered by the population as acts of liberation from France and were presented by the leaders of the coups as such. The revival of Fanon himself amongst decolonial movements even outside of academia is a proof that his text is highly pertinent to the political present.

10 Of course, this is the same globalisation that a number of 'luminaries', as David Harvey calls them, had championed since the 1990s. Given the fact that their discourse has been vigorously critiqued by scholars such as Harvey (2009) himself, Gilroy (2005), and Trouillot (2001), as a neo-liberal discourse disguised as a new one, Bhabha added the term 'contemporary'. But perhaps the world has always been global, in the sense that it has always been connected. The existence of empires in Asia, Europe, and Africa and their interactions are evidence of that. The world today is undoubtedly new. Admitting its newness is also admitting that today is made of yesterday and that the colonial legacy and the dynamics of decolonisation are part of the world today.

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6

FORKED TONGUES

Translation and (De)colonisation in Two Global Novels by Contemporary Women Writers

Claire Chambers

Introduction

In June 2023, a row broke out over translations of some revolutionary poetry by Qiu Jin, which the author and translator Yilin Wang had undertaken for the British Museum. Writing in the *Guardian*, Nadia Khomami (2023, n.p.) reports that Wang complained of plagiarism, lack of payment, and no credit for her work in support of a high-profile exhibition entitled China's Hidden Century. In response, the museum apologised for what they framed as an inadvertent error, belatedly giving her the pay she was owed. Wang was not appeased. In a statement published on her own website, she described the British Museum as being 'accountable for copyright and moral rights infringement and the erasure of feminist poet Qiu Jin' (Wang, 2023, n.p.). On her Twitter/X timeline from the handle @yilinwriter, Wang repeatedly used and reposted material using the hashtags #NameTheTranslator and #PayTheTranslator, but she stopped short of calling the museum's conduct imperialist. However, other Twitter/X users were quick to see its actions as stealing. They contextualised the row against the backdrop of debates about the British Museum returning artefacts it had acquired as colonial loot. Certainly, Wang felt she had been treated as a mere conduit of linguistic expression only to be discarded when the work was done. This dispute encapsulates imperial imprints within translation strategies that persist to the present day, and which will be traced in the literary criticism that follows.

My chapter argues that the interplay between translation, decolonisation, and representation is a clear focal point in contemporary global fiction by two women writers. I analyse translation's dual role – its forked tongue – of simultaneously perpetuating and challenging colonial legacies. Through an

DOI: 10.4324/9781003351986-7

exploration of two very different works set in the colonial metropole – R. F. Kuang's speculative historical novel *Babel; Or, the Necessity of Violence: An Arcane History of the Oxford Translators' Revolution* and Ayesha Manazir Siddiqi's debut novel *The Centre* – I will dissect how language, power dynamics, and cultural hierarchies are imbricated in these narratives. I contend that Kuang's protagonist, Robin Swift, born in Canton, becomes emblematic of the contradictions of linguistic and cultural translation. Robin's journey from his original Chinese name and home to an Anglicised identity serves as a microcosm of the imperial strategy to assert control through language. Kuang weaves together historical and fictional events and figures into an ornate neo-Victorian fabric that highlights the complicity of translation in the colonising mission. By contrast, Siddiqi's *The Centre* is set in the present day, and beckons readers into a twenty-first century realm of knowledge, power, and privilege. Siddiqi exposes the linguistic colonialism engrained within the multilingual landscape of contemporary London. The novel probes the entitlement often associated with dominant language speakers, as well as the asymmetries that persist within language acquisition. By wrongfooting widespread expectations about translation, Siddiqi encourages self-reflection on linguistic dominance and the politics that arise when one language is borne across to another.

Despite the contribution of translation into English to the colonial project which each author condemns, their novels both quietly endorse South–South translations. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak also emphasises the importance of language acquisition, and so, despite all the problems with translation these authors trace in their novels, I take as my point of departure Spivak's stirring summons: 'if you are interested in talking about the other, and/or in making a claim to be the other, it is crucial to learn other languages' (2009/1993, 215). In a world scarred by the persistence of colonial injustices, contemporary global fiction functions as a powerful avenue for exploring multilingualism, the conundrum of linguistic expression, and the mechanics of translation and (de)colonisation. These works largely set in the Global North by two young women writers of colour with roots in the Global South expose the inextricable connections between language, representation, and power. In addition to their cultural and linguistic backgrounds, their young age and gender are also significant, as both writers take an intersectional feminist approach to translation and decolonisation. As we shall see, Kuang brings ideas about nineteenth-century discrimination against women (and other 'others') to a contemporary TikTok audience. Conversely, Siddiqi's novel resonates with lovers of millennial pop music, and her novel has a MeToo-influenced plot strand.

I bring Kuang and Siddiqi together to ignite critical reflection on the subversive potential of language against the faultlines of an interconnected but unequal world. Through analysis of their narratives, I steer through the duality of translation, highlighting both its potential as a bridgehead and its

capacity as a vehicle for domination and expungement. As readers engage with these texts, they confront linguistic identity, cultural hierarchies, and the illusory but urgent imperative to decolonise language (an initiative which Gayatri Spivak in this volume (23) says is something 'we must [do], knowing it cannot be done' and which Abdelmajid Hannoum terms 'doable, even if impossible' (82)). The contribution of the present chapter to the field of translation and decolonisation lies in its exploration, via the cutting-edge fiction of Kuang and Siddiqi, of translation's sedimentation within strata of the colonial enterprise. At stake here is translation's use both as a tool for imperial exploitation and as a potential route for South–South communication and at least some measure of decolonisation.

Translation as Colonialism's Engine Fuel in R. F. Kuang's *Babel*

Rebecca F. Kuang's latest novel *Yellowface* (2023), a hilarious and haunting satire about the publishing industry, has recently garnered critical plaudits and reached the bestseller charts. However, it is her previous book *Babel* (2022) that interests me here. Whereas *Yellowface* concerns contemporary America, *Babel* is a capacious piece of speculative fiction mostly set in the Oxford of the 1830s. It was published during the Covid-19 pandemic under the then twenty-five-year-old author's abbreviated first name, and became a surprise hit due in part to its popularity on BookTok (see Flood, 2021; Touma, 2022). As I will discuss, the novel deals with issues of language, translation, and colonialism in a startlingly original way.

Protagonist Robin Swift had been born in Canton and given a Chinese name that is never disclosed. After his mother's death in the so-called Asiatic Cholera pandemic of the late 1820s, a professor called Richard Lovell becomes his guardian for reasons initially unknown. Before bringing him to England, Lovell allows the boy to choose his own name. The child decides, seemingly of his own free will, on 'Robin' for the nursery rhyme bird and 'Swift' for the author of *Gulliver's Travels*. However, the Christmas associations of a robin and imperial overtones of Jonathan Swift's satire on travel writing (2012/1726) indicate that Lovell is translating the identity of his young charge into something legible to the colonising British. As is well known, wiping out Indigenous names and replacing them with Anglicised versions was part of the so-called civilising mission's strategy of naming and claiming (Carter, 2010/1987; Gramich, 2022, 107–109). Lovell prepares Robin for admission at the prestigious Royal Institute of Translation at Oxford, nicknamed Babel by students, since the multilingual institute is housed in a tower. Compared with the discriminatory admission policy of the rest of Oxford University in that period at least, Babel is multilingual, multicultural, and even accepts women. Here Robin makes three friends: Ramy from Calcutta, Haitian Victoire, and the English rose Letty. Embarking on the institute's

intensive language programme, the teenagers' friendship too quickly becomes intense. Ramy, Victoire, and Robin still feel a complex loyalty to the (quasi) colonised homelands they had to leave behind. Cracks start to emerge in their relationship with Letty, who holds sympathy for the British civilising mission.

The magical Oxford portrayed in *Babel* is reminiscent of Hogwarts, if J. K. Rowling spoke five languages and had a PhD in postcolonial studies. In the physical tower as well as Oxford's metaphorical ivory towers, these young adults encounter the linguistic ideas of the Anglicist Thomas B. Macaulay (1800–1859) and Orientalist William Jones (1746–1794), with the latter's fictional nephew Sterling Jones even studying at the translation college. In 1835, Macaulay had derisively dismissed the perceived deficiencies of Indian languages in his 'Minute on Indian Education', persuading British administrators that instructing Indian students in Sanskrit, Persian, or Hindustani[1] was futile. He argued that, 'by universal confession', these languages had produced 'no books on any subject which deserve to be compared to our own' (1995/1835, 429). In contrast to this racist perspective, the linguist, translator, and poet Jones dedicated his life to studying and translating Indian texts. Jones is widely praised for his innovative research that revealed the kinship between European tongues and the Indic languages. Garland Cannon attributes the unsettling of the European perception of Sanskrit as 'a language once spoken by a supposedly savage people of a greatly different religion and culture' (1990, 246) to Jones's concept of the Indo-European family of languages. Likewise, Saree Makdisi discredits Macaulay's Eurocentrism in the light of 'the more charitable views of people like William Jones' (2014, 181). On the flip side, Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi demonstrates that, while Jones is remembered as a significant figure in comparative linguistics, the contributions of Indian and Persian scholars to his research have been disregarded (1996, 3–8).

A similar proposal to Tavakoli-Targhi's regarding Jones's paternalistic exploitation is advanced by *Babel*. In Kuang's novel, Jones gets all the glory for a Sanskrit Grammatica published by the institute, with his Indian informants sitting 'submissively on the floor before him like children receiving a lesson' (Kuang, 2022, 63).[2] In one illuminating footnote, the narrator argues that Jones only studied Sanskrit 'because he suspected indigenous translators of being dishonest and unreliable' (379). In another note (356), we are told that although Jones was an outspoken abolitionist, enslaved people worked in his household. Clearly, even though Jones is more sympathetic than Macaulay, the former was still an Orientalist and a man of contradictions who harboured a far greater love for pure language than the racialised others speaking it. Small wonder, then, that his imaginary nephew Sterling Jones proves to be one of the novel's most vicious colonial apologists. Here the silver-based and profit-pursuing connotations of Sterling's first name should not escape readers' attention.

Babel is a neo-Victorian novel in two ways: first, it is a contemporary reinterpretation of themes and styles from Victorian literature, featuring steampunk formal elements. Second, the world Kuang portrays is newly Victorian, with Queen Victoria only coming to the throne in 1837, partway through the narrative arc. In the midst of the Queen's coronation in 1838 and other real-world historical events, the royal institute's brilliant scholars (known with some irony as Babblers) have little choice but to translate for the Crown. An examination of Edward Said's analysis of Victorian fiction's connections to empire sheds light on Kuang's interpretation of the period in general and Charles Dickens's work in particular. Robin reads Dickens and concludes that the novelist 'was very funny but seemed to hate very much anyone who was not white' (34). In *Culture and Imperialism* (1993, xv–xvii, 13–14, 91), Said similarly argues that even if Dickens's novels appear to have minimal colonial ties, they significantly contributed to the imagining of empire. This influence manifests itself in Kuang's format. The novel's knowingly unwieldy title,[3] as well as the fact that *Babel* is divided into five 'Books', recall the verbose multi-decker novels popular in the 1800s. Moreover, nineteenth-century literature often featured motifs of the gothic doppelganger or changeling children. Kuang adopts and reinvents these tropes through Robin and his half-brother Griffin, who resemble each other and (as we will see) share a shadowy father, barely having known their respective Chinese mothers, who both died young. Just as Said does (2005, 351, 455), Kuang shows how translation is complicit in expansionism, since 'translation involves a spatial dimension – a literal transportation of texts across conquered territory, words delivered like spices from an alien land' (108).[4] The tentacles connecting language, academia, and imperialism are traced in Kuang's depiction of this 'parallel Oxford' (259), wherein translation becomes a tool for territorial expansion and cultural dominance. As this fantastical campus novel unfolds, linguistic imperialism (Phillipson, 1992) comes into sharp focus.

Notwithstanding the novel's historical underpinnings and weighty footnotes,[5] much of the plot is pure fantasy. Here the British Empire's most sought-after goods are not gold, ivory, oil, or rubber. Nor does the opium that so damaged China in the nineteenth century feature prominently as a commodity, even though the novel's climax relies on the first opium war (1839–1842). Instead, translators control the empire using silver bars, which are fuelled by a linguistic enchantment called 'match-pairs' (75, 99, 120, and on). Each bar's power comes when a word from one language is engraved on it together with its nearly but not quite perfect partner from another tongue, which words are then pronounced with intent by someone who knows both languages. The bars' mystical essence seems to stem from the gap that exists between lexical equivalents and, more broadly, from the enigmatic realm where meaning is forged (see Pulley, 2022, n.p.). Like silver, language is a

'resource' (166), and so it is opened up to Western extractivism (see Moore, 2015; Szeman and Wenzel, 2021). Like fossil fuels, silver bars 'powered the engines' (487) of Britain, the silver in its turn being galvanised by the match-pairs. In the story world, then, as in the real world, language is the engine fuel of the colonial project.

The match-pairs and the issue of untranslatability (Apter, 2013) produce an array of effects, ranging from pleasure and productivity to brutal murder. The German *Sitzfleisch* ('"sitting meat" [. . . or] sit on your bottom and get things done' (171)) is one of many untranslatable words from various languages which are introduced in the narrative. However, such an erudite novel exploring global etymologies is bound to make a few small errors. 'Chit came from the Marathi chitti, meaning "letter" or "note"' (169), proclaims the narrator confidently. Yet the usual word for 'letter' in Marathi is पत्र, patra. The language with which the English word 'chit' most likely originates is Hindustani (Hindi's chitthi (चिट्ठी) and Urdu's chithi (چٹھی) both derive from the Sanskrit चिष्ट, chishta, or 'message'). In Hindustani خط, khat, and पत्र, patra, are other common words for a letter or note. Despite this possible misstep, Kuang's overall point about the gains that emerge when some undertones are lost in translation is a strong one.

Long-standing ideas from translation studies are dramatised engagingly in *Babel*. For example, the tension of 'fidelity' (153) to authors versus domestication of these authors' texts for readerly enjoyment is often debated by the Babblers (see Venuti, 1993). Whether the translator should remain invisible like a pane of glass or exercise a more obtrusive creativity is another live topic of concern (Benjamin, 1973/1923). Letty wants to stay true to the European Ur-text, whereas Ramy 'was always ready to abandon technical accuracy for rhetorical flourishes he insisted would better deliver the point, even when this meant insertion of completely novel clauses' (126). Such creativity suggests one route towards a decolonised translation, eschewing faithfulness to and reverence for the source in favour of a demotic writing back. I will return to this resistant idea in the chapter's second half, when I examine Ayesha Manazir Siddiqi's evocation of the 'cannibal translation' of such experimental and anti-colonial writers as Haroldo de Campos. Yet above all, Kuang conveys that translation should be about attentiveness to diverse voices. Non-Europeans regularly find themselves 'carefully translating [them]sel[ves] to white people' so as to circumvent 'distortions' (406–407). Somewhat didactically, the Chinese-American author shows that this kind of cowed self-translation should give way to mutual linguistic and cultural exchange amid a respect for alterity. At the novel's end Ramy avers: 'That's just what translation is, I think. That's all speaking is. Listening to the other and trying to see past your own biases to glimpse what they're trying to say' (537). Notions of faithfulness, artistry, and inclusion reverberate throughout *Babel*, reflecting the transformative power of listening without prejudice through decolonised translations.

An Irish Babeller, Cathy O'Nell,[6] is the novel's sole White character who has a friendly disposition that welcomes all, regardless of their backgrounds. Cathy's empathy manifests itself as an unwavering allyship (Carlson et al., 2020) towards her classmates of colour, which contrasts with the vacillations of that other White woman, Letty. The Irish character's steadfast allegiance remains discreetly underscored by her clandestine affiliation with the Hermes rebel faction, about which organisation I will have more to say shortly. Accordingly, she works to 'siphon out resources' from Babel (384). Cathy opposes the translation institute since she feels solidarity for the mill labourers put out of work by Babel's ruthless use of silver bars. As a colonised Irish woman, Cathy has also identified 'the great contradiction of colonialism', namely its cannibalistic urge to 'destroy that which it prizes most' (386). The young woman works in the 'lonel[y]' field of translating Gaelic (135), a language supposed to be dying which gets virtually 'no respect' (372). Most Babblers lump Irish together with Manx and Cornish as tongues whose study is unlikely to succeed (166; for more on the Irish language, see Cronin, 2005). Ultimately, this vibrant but minor character sacrifices her life for resistance, for at the novel's end it becomes clear she has been shot dead by Babellers.

The hegemony of the English language and the silver-powered steam engines and ships of the British Empire do not go unchallenged. Robin gets drawn into a dissidents' secret society which, it transpires, is led by his half-brother Griffin. This young man reveals that they are the 'bastard child[ren] of Empire' (Rushdie, 1997, xii), having both been sired by Professor Lovell during his various trips to China on colonial business. Griffin is not only angry with the father's abandonment but with Babel's whole mission, declaring:

> This is a deliberate exploitation of foreign culture and foreign resources. The professors like to pretend that the tower is a refuge for pure knowledge, that it sits above the mundane concerns of business and commerce, but it does not. It's intricately tied to the business of colonialism. It *is* the business of colonialism. Ask yourself why the Literature Department only translates works into English and not the other way around.
>
> (102; emphasis in original)

Griffin's impassioned speech exposes the entanglement of translation in the imperial enterprise, shedding light on its asymmetry and exploitation. That said, while the elder brother scorns the complicity of colonised Babellers, he is envious of Robin's wealth, student status, and mastery over the bars. This facility with match-pairs Griffin cannot equal because he left Canton at a younger age and therefore neither dreams nor experiences his memories in Chinese.

Griffin is the leader of Hermes, the movement's name deriving from hermeneutics and, ultimately, the Greek messenger god. The Hermes Society resists

the dominant approach to other languages that entails 'coercive extraction' (178) within capitalist colonialism's 'extractive economy' (399). Working underground for linguistic and political revolution, Hermes' members instead believe a decolonised translation could be possible, since languages encapsulate various worldviews and provide 'a thousand different ways of seeing' (537). Indeed, Professor Playfair – one of the tutors who works at Hermes's nemesis institution of Babel – remarks that translation can lead to peace because it 'makes possible communication' (83) between people from different cultures.

In spite of their education and high ideals, though, Griffin and his comrades are far from being naive pacifists. Differing from Professor Playfair's lofty rhetoric but anticipating Spivak and Hannoum in this volume, they see translation as 'a necessary endeavour, however futile' (537). As well as providing opportunities for plunder, for Hermes moving between languages also enables a voyage between different realms of thought and connects the wretched of the earth. The novel's first subtitle *Or, the Necessity of Violence* indicates the Hermes group's Fanonian belief that the violence of colonialism, within empire's racist and sadistic structures, can only be defeated by counter-violence (Fanon, 2001/1961). The silver bars are a sublimated version of the actual violence of linguistic extractivism. Language was inextricable from colonial violence from the outset, with the first colonial interpreters having been enslaved, co-opted from imperial battlefields, snatched up in kidnappings, and so on (Karttunen, 2008/2000). Unsurprisingly, then, the first proper chapter of the novel's final 'Book' opens with the following epigraph from Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*: 'Colonialism is not a machine capable of thinking, a body endowed with reason. It is naked violence and only gives in when confronted with greater violence' (443; see also Fanon, 2001/1961, 61). Elsewhere in *The Wretched of the Earth*, the Martinican psychiatrist-turned-Algerian-revolutionary examines how racialised others turn to violence, 'sharpen[ing] their weapons' as they reject the colonisers' construction of them as lesser humans (Fanon, 2001/1961, 5, 8). Relatedly, one of Robin's match-pairs is from the Chinese character 利 (lì). From Robin's focalisation, readers are told that this character 'could mean to sharpen one's weapon, though it also carried connotations of profit and advantage' (477). Evolving beyond their educational foundations, Griffin and his companions thus develop a defiant Fanonian strategy for dealing with the untrammelled violence of colonialism.

In light of all this Fanon-inspired discussion of counter-violence, hegemonic violence should be scrutinised in more detail. The same ironically named Professor Playfair, despite the lip service he had paid to peace, later observes with airy unconcern that 'translation means doing violence upon the original' (155). Accordingly, Babel's silver bars, fuelled by its translators' match-pairs, often wreak destruction on others. In the face of the translation institute's

aggression, Hermes advocates violence as the appropriate response. Griffin proclaims: 'Violence is the only language they [the colonial establishment] understand, because their system of extraction is inherently violent' (399). In this way, Griffin and his co-conspirators strive for linguistic equity while also acknowledging the imperative of measured resistance against entrenched colonial oppression. The novel illustrates how violence is born out of translation, yet it also counters this with a form of violent resistance stemming from the interplay of languages. For instance, when Robin is provoked as his father talks of the son's 'base, original stock' (322) while refusing to pronounce the mother's name, it is Robin's wordplay with various languages' equivalents for anger or rage that powers the bar that kills Professor Lovell. If the winds of translation too often bring destruction for the other, here they carry the seeds of transformation and decolonisation.

In spite of translation's bridge-building or resistant potential, many of Babel's translation professors hold abhorrent racial opinions, including that other languages are inferior to European ones; that Ramy as an Indian is dirty and backward; or that Robin and Griffin, with their Chinese heritage, are indolent 'half-breeds' (181). Even though the Babblers are vitally important for the imperial mission, the individuals among them are 'expendable' (203). As with the British Museum's use and abuse of Yilin Wang, Babel's translators are treated as mere 'vessels for the languages they spoke' (203) or even as 'talking dictionar[ies]' (320). In her review of the novel, Rachel S. Corasco rightly observes that Robin, Ramy, and Victoire are 'pawns in this colonial game, used for their fluency in Chinese, Arabic, Kreyol, and other languages' (2023, n.p.). As Griffin and his friends contend with the vicissitudes of language learning amid a racist segregation within Babel, their quest for decolonised translation illuminates the radical power of language amid land-grabs and inequality. Ultimately, Robin comes to believe what his half-brother Griffin already knows, namely that the colonial system

> could not *cannibalize* itself and survive. The hands of the Empire were tied, because it could not raze that from which it profited. And like those bodies of unwilling labour, Babel was an asset. Britain needed Chinese, needed Arabic and Sanskrit and all the languages of colonized territories to function. Britain could not hurt [a] Babel [turned revolutionary] without hurting itself. And so Babel alone, an asset denied, could grind the Empire to a halt. (458; emphasis added)

Here an image of self-cannibalisation or autophagy exposes the occupiers' simultaneous power and dependency. A paradox, or what Homi K. Bhabha has termed 'the ambivalence of desire', hoves into view (1994, 72). Empire is unable to devour its own gains; to mix a metaphor, it cannot have its pound of flesh *and* eat it. Elsewhere in the novel, Cathy drives home the parallels between language

learning and consumption with her joke about a 'dictionary of tongues' which includes 'boiled tongue, pickled tongue, dried tongue' (388). The allusion to various culinary preparations of tongues is a humorous way of emphasising the diversity of languages and the cannibalistic violence inherent in the push to catalogue them. Here, then, is tongue that can literally be forked. In the block quote, the Babel institute appears as an essential but potentially rebellious asset, which becomes the only force with the power to immobilise the empire. This reveals the fragility of conquest and the fact that translation's bifurcated nature risks self-devouring. Presently we will turn to another novel, this one dealing much more extensively with cannibalism as a metaphor: Siddiqi's *The Centre*. However, to conclude the present section, in the enchanting realm of Kuang's *Babel*, translation is both colonialism's engine fuel and a potential path to decolonisation (Spivak, 2009/1993, 200–225). With its rich historical seam and imaginative twists, Kuang's novel underscores the urgent need to listen to marginalised voices and the tongues in which they speak.

Cannibalistic Neo-Colonial Translation in Ayesha Manazir Siddiqi's *The Centre*

Siddiqi's debut novel *The Centre* takes readers into a cut-throat world of language, translation, and profit. Historically speaking, her characters inhabit postcolonial Britain of the twenty-first century, but *The Centre* highlights the enduring damage of the White gaze and colonial ideologies. Set in London, and to a lesser extent Karachi and Delhi, the work explores the consequences of multilingualism, ambition, and linguistic colonialism. Siddiqi's protagonist, Anisa Ellahi, is a Pakistani who since her young adulthood has been based in London. There she makes a living subtitling Bollywood movies. The anti-Muslim politics of some of these films bothers her, as she grapples with the job's banality and feelings of professional inadequacy. An example of the sort of picture being portrayed is Sanjay Leela Bhansali's wildly successful but virulently anti-Muslim movie *Padmaavat* (Bhansali, 2018), as the novel describes it as 'a big-budget blockbuster set in medieval India, where for the bad guys, the filmmakers had drawn on every Islamophobic stereotype they could think of' (Siddiqi, 2023a, 44;[7] see also Roy and Schwaderer, 2020). To switch off from work that makes her 'blood boil' (44), Anisa spends time with her best friend Naima and a tomcat she names Billee. Siddiqi captures her protagonist's personal struggles too, including her frustrating relationship with a White boyfriend, Adam. Having shown no promise in Urdu before, this man suddenly acquires fluency in his girlfriend's mother tongue. It is Adam's revelation of the mysterious 'Centre', a language programme offering complete mastery after just ten days, that kick-starts Anisa's career arc. Like her now ex-boyfriend before her, Anisa takes immersive courses at the Centre. She becomes fluent first in German and then Russian. The speed

of this comes at a sinister and undisclosed cost, so readers are led to probe the ethical implications of language acquisition.

The Centre's focus is very timely. Many people around the globe started learning languages over the internet or on apps when confined to their homes amid lockdown restrictions early in the coronavirus pandemic (Whitebloom, 2020, n.p.). How many of them continued once the world opened up is less clear. Even so, the novel is on the zeitgeist as it gives the impression of learners' stumbling attempts at Hindustani, German, and Russian that have been intercepted and appraised by the narrator. Siddiqi also casts a sceptical eye at illusory fast-track language mastery programmes. From the 1960s onwards, pedagogical emphasis was put on listening, even during sleep, which was said to teach a new language as if by osmosis. The auditory approach's benefits were exaggerated, of course (Nazarieh et al., 2021). Shiba, the Centre's director from India, shines a spotlight on claims that the audiolingual method was 'Almost like osmosis. Almost like a miracle' (103). Her Centre relies upon listening booths and endless uncomprehending consumption of so-called Storytellers' recordings by Learners,[8] who pay £20,000 each for their ten days of immersion. *The Centre* encourages reflection on linguistic hierarchies and the dominance of certain languages over others. In her review of the novel, Bidisha Mamata asks, 'If you could become fluent in any new tongue as if by magic, have you really earned the right to know it? . . . Is paying a high fee to collect languages so facilely an extension of colonial greed?' (2023, n.p.). More broadly, to pose a question Siddiqi explores in a chapter for the volume *Violent Phenomena: 21 Essays on Translation*, what happens 'when you take on someone else's tongue?' (Siddiqi, 2022, 99). In the wake of global language learning trends, *The Centre* emerges as a well-timed and incisive narrative grappling with neo-colonial language consumption.

Just as Siddiqi's characters wrestle with their own linguistic competence, her novel encourages readers from the Global North to think more self-critically about forays they may have made into non-European languages. They should be mindful of their privilege as dominant language speakers, yet the conviction that other languages must open up instantly to them as English-speakers is as engrained as it is damaging. This tenacious idea is one that the novel contests through its explorations of the politics of language learning. In an interview with me, Siddiqi remarked:

> There is the idea, when people choose to have non-English words in their novels, of, 'Oh, if you don't understand, just look it up.' And yeah, okay. You could. But also, maybe, don't. Maybe, if you don't understand, it's not *for* you. And maybe that's okay. Maybe let it be. Maybe leave it alone. But the entitlement of dominant language speakers is such that they feel everything must be accessible to them.
>
> (Siddiqi, 2023b, n.p.)

As we shall see, Siddiqi refuses the translation of the words from Urdu and Hindi that pepper the novel, in addition to refusing italicisation of non-English words. An extra layer of meaning is revealed for Hindustani speakers, which is 'maybe . . . not *for*' the monolingual English readers who might be tempted to look the words up on Google Translate. In this context, it is crucial to acknowledge my own position as a White scholar with only B1-level Urdu and B2-level Hindi[9] and to consider the ethics of interpreting what might not be intended for me. With this book having a modest circulation projected to be multicultural and multilingual, I hope like Kuang's Cathy O'Nell to be an ally, cognisant of the nuances within the narrative that I'm about to explore further but without making all of them glibly accessible. I come back to Spivak's point about learning languages to know the other, and to Ipek Demir's and my premise in this book that translation can be a vehicle for decolonisation.

The Centre is a novel about writing, rewriting, translating, and co-creation. In it, bilingual wordplay and metafiction function as languages which are ripe for translating. Indeed, Siddiqi's text teems with largely camouflaged allusions. For instance, earlier I mentioned the pet Anisa names Billee (not to be confused with the male nickname Billy). Billee (in the Nastaliq script بلی) is the Urdu word for cat. Hindustani is a heavily gendered language, with even infinitive verbs being inflected as masculine, feminine, or plural in some situations. Anisa thinks of her mother's 'amrood ki jelly' (38) and this, the Urdu for 'guava jelly', provides an example of the way in which Hindustani assigns genders to English words. A new word like 'coronavirus' is quickly given a gender, in this case masculine. To take older examples, 'computer' is masculine but 'bus' and, in the present case, 'jelly' are feminine. As such, the 'ki' for 'of' in amrood ki jelly is the feminine form (rather than the masculine 'of', 'ka'). While the gendering of absorbed terms may be arbitrary, it is also relational and holds true for the entirety of India's and Pakistan's Hindustani belt. Additionally, the default gender for cat (billee or بلی) is feminine (most words ending with 'ee' are feminine). However, there is a somewhat rarer word for tomcat, billaa (بلا). To call her male cat Billee is therefore funny and playful. The fact that the author has done the same thing in 'real life' (305; Siddiqi, 2022, 96) adds a metafictional layer.

Metafiction is literature which draws attention to its own status as fiction and, as Kuang's and Siddiqi's novels both do, self-consciously challenges the artificial divide between literature and historical events (see Hutcheon, 1988). Another example from *The Centre* is an awkward and abusive sexual encounter where we glimpse two endings, one in which Anisa thwarts her seducer and another where she succumbs to him. The duality of resolutions recalls John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1972/1969) in offering the reader a choice of what to believe. In addition to this MeToo moment, the novel ultimately employs the trope of the true story, whereby Anisa's

transformation into a Storyteller who records her own narrative, as well as Naima's later transmutation into the story's Listener and translator of its 'tender things' (290),[10] means that the text has the whole time been unfolding its self-creation. In the novel's purposefully formulaic climax at Naima's 'colourful' desi wedding (24), the bride points out a publisher, 'S', among the guests (301).[11] Naima urges Anisa to transcribe her own recordings, 'chang[ing] all the names and pretend[ing] it's fiction' (292), before sending the manuscript to S for publication. The novel's linguistic and metafictional play keeps readers guessing as if they were translating from a new language, and encourages them to re-examine accepted truths.

A more sharply witty example of a covert bilingual reference arises during Anisa's time at the Centre. There she encounters 'someone famous', but demurs at revealing the woman's identity, saying: 'Maybe I'll just give her a code name. Let's call her, I don't know, Darzi Tez' (89). Darzi (in Nastaliq درزی) is the Urdu word for a tailor, while tez (تیز) means fast. Siddiqi thus gives a wink and a nod to her Hindustani-speaking audience that this celebrity, whose music Anisa says she doesn't know well, could be Taylor Swift. The present example, as with the previous one about Billee, is the kind of sophisticated language game which couldn't easily be 'translated' by an algorithm or translation programme. The vignettes demand an understanding of language's distinct logics, which is precisely the point Siddiqi wants to make.

The novelist goes on to write of Darzi Tez that it was as if 'she was lit from within. Blonde and petite and practically levitating, this woman, who I'm pretty sure claims to be vegan, was sitting cross-legged on her chair at the table in front of me, voraciously eating her bolognese' (89). This luminescent depiction roughly approximates the real-world pop princess's appearance. Looking more precisely, though, the representation of Taylor Swift is itself something of a mistranslation. The star is certainly not petite at nearly six feet tall, although she is very slender. Swift is no vegan either, but the meat that her alter ego Darzi Tez is eating (possibly renouncing her earlier veganism) is used deliberately to move the plot forward. As well as this 'bolognese', we are later made privy to delicious but markedly animal-based meals served as part of the Centre's special diet. This food includes non-vegetarian samosas, 'roasted aubergine topped with mincemeat', and 'a Sri Lankan curry, with tender morsels of meat' (84, 88, 144). We will return to this fleshy sustenance later on, but for now I submit that both Darzi Tez's name and the careful staging of meat-eating contain meanings not intended to be understood by out-groups. Non-Hindustani speakers cannot see that the pop star is Taylor Swift's alter ego, and at this point in the novel the significance of Darzi Tez's carnivorous enjoyment is unclear to first-time readers.

As well as Siddiqi's use of untranslated words, her intertextual references are also akin to a code that can be deciphered in a process not unlike translation. Confines of space mean that, mirroring the Kuang section's discussion

of Dickens, I will only trace the writing back to a single Victorian 'classic', Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (2008/1899). For instance, parallels emerge when Anisa undergoes expert scrutiny before entering the Centre, reminiscent of the scene of Marlow's induction from Brussels into the colonial venture along the Congo River. In both narratives women knit as adventurers depart, just as ghoulish female spectators were said to have knitted while waiting for guillotine executions during the French Revolution. Furthermore, before they can go into the unknown worlds of the African continent and a mysterious language course, respectively, Marlow and Anisa – people ambitious and foolhardy enough to embark on these dangerous journeys – first have to undergo medical examinations. The doctors conducting the medicals request permission to measure their patients' heads with callipers in both tales. They do this out of a scientific interest in craniometry or the racist pseudoscience of phrenology. When asked about the likely comparison of head measurements before and after the trip, both doctors in the texts say the same thing: 'the changes take place inside' (Conrad, 2008/1899, 112; Siddiqi, 2023, 72). Siddiqi's text also makes explicit mention of *Heart of Darkness*'s author as a Pole who remade English through his writing because it was his third language, acquired quickly in adulthood. The doctor marvels that Conrad 'didn't speak any English until well into his twenties' (71). His admiration for the modernist writer signals the doctor's imperialistic proprietorship towards Anisa and her cranium since, as Siddiqi puts it in her essay–chapter, *Heart of Darkness* is 'a book that may well have reinforced the prevailing anti-blackness of our culture' (2022, 88). This intertextuality draws attention to translation's ties with colonialism through shared images of the unconcern of knitting bystanders, the vetting undergone by the intrepid explorers, and the colonial idea that physiognomy might reveal something about character. Over and above these specific parallels are the foregrounding of adult language acquisition and a preoccupation with linguistic or cultural translation's effects on those who voyage out into the so-called heart of darkness.

In *The Centre*, Siddiqi encourages an interrogation of White privilege by her 'target audience' which she says is not White (2022, 99). When Anisa takes Adam to visit her family in Karachi, he delights in the city's 'incredible hospitality' (43). This irks Anisa, who knows that racialised people wouldn't receive such treatment if they similarly tried out their Urdu on Karachiites. (Elsewhere she thinks of this sort of phenomenon as part of 'the double standards of language learning' (12).) 'What Adam was witnessing', the first-person narrator remarks acidly, 'were the remnants of a culture where once he was, *by law*, obeyed and pacified'. The warm welcome he enjoys is 'a legacy of his people's wrongdoing' (43; emphasis in original). Steering through language hierarchies, *The Centre* thus provokes consideration of dominance and privilege in linguistic pursuits.

Siddiqi alludes to the role of English in Pakistan itself. Imperial residues mean that the European language is esteemed above Urdu and seen as a status symbol. 'It is undeniable', she told me, 'that some languages are preferred over others, that some have higher value and are even considered to be more "sophisticated", to be the carriers of more intellectual thought. This is not coincidental; it is constructed' (2023b, n.p.). For this reason, among others, Anisa thinks that becoming a 'real translator' or even a more fulfilled person would involve the acquisition of European languages. 'The Greats', she muses, 'Dostoyevsky and Tolstoy, Gogol and Chekhov . . . What was it that made them so great? Could it be something in the language itself?' (138). Anisa's father evinces an even stronger 'cultural cringe' (Phillips, 2005/1950) towards Europeans, attributing to the British a greater intelligence than Pakistanis and putting this superiority down to the love for queues in Britain, as he remarks, 'Queuing bodies make queuing minds'. To this, his wife immediately ripostes: 'Haan, bilkul. Queuing to bomb us' (41). Again, 'Haan, bilkul' – a sarcastically deferential 'Yes, of course' – is not carried across into English, but the mother's quip detonates explosively for all that.

Like Anisa, Siddiqi moved to the UK from Pakistan at the age of eighteen. Her Urdu was 'far from perfect' to begin with, and still isn't, but 'it's always felt important to hold onto' (2023, n.p.). She taught beginners Urdu for a while and has translated texts from both French and Urdu into English. Hence, she relates to Anisa's desire to become a translator (the character too has intermediate-level French). Here is another metafictional element, with metafiction being especially noticeable when Anisa assumes as a pseudonym the name of her nani or maternal grandmother, Ayesha, while at the Centre. Ayesha is of course also the author's first name, and clearly the names Anisa and Ayesha share a syllabic musicality and the first and last letter A. As a consequence of this nomenclature, the lines between character and author, fact and fiction continue to be blurred.

Bilingualism plays a conspicuous role in the novel. Siddiqi weaves words such as 'nakcharhi' (snob) and 'matlabi' (selfish), as well as phrases such as 'aram se' (at ease, restfully) into the narrative (75, 119, 171). Wordplay dances across the pages, as when Naima meets Anisa's scepticism about her new love interest with the following inimitable sentence: 'I know, but when you know, you know, you know?' (173).[12] Echo-pairs, such as 'YouTube shoetube' (228), 'Tinder-shinder' (254), and 'iClouds shy-clouds' (275) are striking. In Hindustani, echo-pairs are linguistic structures where a phrase is repeated with a slight variation, often for emphasis, rhythm, or comic effect. Siddiqi unobtrusively shows that English has its own echo-words, as in the nonsensical pairing 'fuddy-duddy' to denote old-fashioned stuffiness (223). She explained to me that her intention with the echoes was not humour and that she rejected a writerly code-switching that can be mocking or othering. The novelist argued that authors sometimes take their mother tongue

and translate it for mainstream consumers, to evoke masala or a sense of the exotic. By contrast, she noted, 'I tried to write as I speak, to write as if I were telling the story to my sister, for instance, or my mother, or my best friend. This allows for a certain intimacy, I hope, and also for a resistance to the white gaze' (2023, n.p.). At another metafictional moment, the narrator chants the names of such sisters, mothers, and best friends in a kind of roll call: 'Seema, Nabila, Sara, Saba . . . Naima, Kavita, Khwaja, Arifa . . . Warner, Dickinson, Mingus, Ahmed' (271). Intermixing character names (Naima) with those of friends (Kavita)[13] alongside the surnames of writers or theorists (Marina Warner, Emily Dickinson, Mia Mingus, and Sara Ahmed),[14] the author again interrogates the boundary between fact and fiction and creates an intersectional feminist counter-canon. To me, Siddiqi expressed quiet satisfaction that at no point during the process of publishing with London's Picador was there resistance or questioning of her use of Urdu. 'This feels like a move forward from the times of glossaries or the unnecessary italicisation of 'foreign' words in novels . . . Foreign to whom, exactly?' (2023b, n.p.). Khairani Barokka (2020, n.p.) and others[15] have written about the patronising and distancing italicisation of 'foreign' words in novels, which functions as a kind of colonial gatekeeping. Siddiqi's insistence on linguistic integrity similarly disputes colonial assumptions about non-Western languages' exoticism.

Naima, Anisa's best friend, may have Mirpuri heritage, since she expresses an interest in learning Pahari at the Centre. Pahari, as Sehrish Shafi and Sam Hellmuth succinctly explain, 'known also as 'Mirpuri' or 'Pahari Potwari' […], is a Western Punjabi language with no written form that is spoken by approximately four million people in Pakistan and 500,000 people in the UK' (2024, 108). Siddiqi's characters tacitly recognise that an oral language – such as this one from Azad Kashmir – is in a weaker position than Urdu or Hindi and, therefore, would be unlikely to be offered at an elite language school. As a result, the issue of regional asymmetries is hinted at. Urdu-wallahs' own attempt to subjugate the Bengali language is never aired, however, in either the novel or her earlier essay. Yet the 1971 war that led to the secession of East from West Pakistan to become Bangladesh was partly motivated by the fact that Urdu had been instated as Pakistan's national language to Bengali's great detriment. From certain South Asian perspectives, Urdu, too, is a colonising language, but Siddiqi does not acknowledge this fact.

Using a symbolic comparison in her writing that remains veiled until the novel's culmination, Siddiqi employs cannibalism as an image for the exploitative nature of translation. It becomes apparent that the meat eaten at the Centre is partly sourced from the donated bodies of Storytellers. Often poor, vulnerable, and traumatised, these individuals had not only ultimately shared their bodies but earlier their life stories in the recordings listened to by Learners that facilitated the latter's preternaturally swift language acquisition. Although Anisa and the other Learners hadn't been aware of the process, they had felt their identities merging with those of their Storytellers. Answering the question of what

happens when you take on someone else's tongue, this identitarian slippage fits with Anisa's belief that when she uses her rusty Urdu she becomes a different person from her Anglophone self: 'more honest . . . more childlike' (137). Now Shiba, as the Centre's experienced director, tells Anisa to try to truly assimilate the deceased German and Russian Storytellers into her body via a comprehensive mindfulness. Anisa has an ouroboros feeling, 'like I was cutting up my own tongue with a knife and fork before consuming it with that same tongue' (204). With an unsettling intimacy, Anisa embarks on ingesting her linguistic ghosts.

The Centre's figure of the involuntary cannibal shows how extractivist translation chews up other cultures and spits out what isn't needed. The concept of translation as cannibalism was originally formulated by the Brazilian translator and author of Concrete poetry Haroldo de Campos (1929–2003). His ghoulish autophagic image has become a key framework for understanding translation, particularly in the context of Latin American studies from the 1960s onwards. Recently, Isabel Gomez has published a monograph entitled *Cannibal Translation* (2023), which provides a splendid account of this issue. The book explores the ideas of de Campos, his brother Augusto de Campos, the Mexican writer Octavio Paz, and others. These writers take a rebellious approach to translation that involves imbibing the source text and reclaiming the notion of cannibalism through creative practices such as that which Gomez explores as untranslation, transcreation, and the cultivation of intimate translationships. Taken together, this is an engagement with translation that nourishes decolonial literature, especially since colonialism is itself a form of cannibalism. As noted by Alan Rice, the colonisers 'literally ate away at the cultures of indigenous peoples' (1998, 110).

Accordingly, in their introduction to the 1999 book *Post-Colonial Translation*, subtitled 'Of Colonies, Cannibals and Vernaculars', Susan Bassnett and Harish Trivedi adapt de Campos to draw attention to translation's vampiric tendencies. Bearing one language across to another can be grasping and destructive, with Bassnett and Trivedi comparing it to 'a blood transfusion, where the emphasis is on the health and nourishment of the translator' (1999, 5). Yet even as it drains the source language for sustenance, translation also at times represents resistance. In Bassnett and Trivedi's exploration, an act of cannibalism by the Brazilian Tupinamba tribe in the sixteenth century, as well as the scholars' subsequent metaphor of 'devouring' Europe (1999, 5), become symbolic of postcolonial struggle. They suggest that this metaphor underscores translation's transformative role. According to de Campos, Gomez, and Bassnett and Trivedi, then, postcolonial translation, much like the Tupinambas' cannibalism, at once signifies interconnection, homage, and a violation. The grisly cannibalism practised at the Centre echoes Bassnett and Trivedi's insights by accentuating translation's subversive as well as predatory tendencies.

In a posthumously published interview with Daniel Birnbaum and Anders Olsson (2009, n.p.) which Siddiqi quotes from in the novel (109), Jacques

Derrida plumbs the metaphorical links between cannibalism and human thought.[16] The French theorist explores how Western philosophy incorporates external elements, drawing parallels between understanding and consumption. This idea pervades theory from the Global North, embodied as it is in what Derrida calls 'tropes of cannibalism' (Birnbaum and Olsson, 2009, n.p.). Such tropes include ideas surrounding the Christian Eucharist and Hegel's preoccupation with assimilation. Derrida connects this notion to his deconstructive approach, emphasising its respect for the unassimilable and aligning it with his thoughts on the indeterminate and untranslatable in textual analysis. Yet it is a more playful statement that Siddiqi takes from this interview as a touchstone for her novel: 'To love without wanting to devour must surely be anorexic' (109). Shiba quotes Derrida's words to Anisa. Half in love with this beautiful and inscrutable thirty-something businesswoman, Anisa puzzles over the epigram. She wonders if Shiba intends it as 'a message to back off' and thinks 'the last thing [she] would want to do' was to feast on the other woman (109, 110). In fact, though, Shiba is giving her a clue about the insatiable swallowing of both other languages and human flesh that goes on at the language lab she runs. Siddiqi puts such debates centre stage, unsettling the notion that translation involves building connections. Instead, *The Centre* lays emphasis on its role in gobbling up other languages and cultures.

This bitingly satirical novel shows how (neo)colonising groups strip marginalised languages of their autonomy and cachet. Rather than a tool of communication and aesthetic enjoyment, language becomes a vehicle for domination and the annihilation of heritage. Siddiqi shows that cannibalism occupies a vast conceptual realm within translation studies and (post)colonial imaginaries. It proves insightful in describing acts where subjects consume or incorporate objects of similar nature. Yet she plays down the enabling aspects the Brazilian and postcolonial theorists found in the cannibal metaphor. Perhaps she goes too far in stressing that efforts by speakers of dominant languages to learn other languages can be damaging. Maybe, too, Siddiqi empties out cannibalism of some of its resistant postcoloniality, since its originators largely viewed the metaphor not attaching to translation as a colonising practice but as the precise opposite. Furthermore, she does not address Urdu's domination over Bengali from the late 1940s to the early 1970s, whereby Bangla wasn't made a national language in what was a quasi-colonial move by the dominant West Pakistanis. As Spivak and Kuang (in relation to Macaulay) both note, it is the *refusal* to learn other languages that is most deleterious. And contra Siddiqi's bravura fiction, translation can work in favour of decolonisation.

Conclusion

In October 2015, Arab graffiti artists were hired to paint authentic-looking slogans on the sets of the American drama serial *Homeland*. They chose

instead to daub the walls with the Arabic for 'Homeland is racist', 'Homeland is a joke, and it didn't make us laugh', and '#blacklivesmatter' (Phipps, 2015, n.p.). In *The Centre* Siddiqi has Anisa laughingly describe this incident to her mother, only to turn serious and tell her: 'I want to do something like that . . . To write something like "this is historically inaccurate and highly toxic" in the subtitles [of Hindi movies] . . . We [subalterns] should at least have the right to an afterword' (45). This resonant quotation applies to the novels I have analysed. Like the rebellious graffiti artists, Siddiqi and Kuang subvert what their audience think they know about translation across whole novels rather than being confined to 'afterwords'.

Both *Babel* and *The Centre* deploy untranslatable words, intertextuality, and multilingualism to engage with the theme of translation and decolonisation. Kuang's exploration of match-pairs and untranslatable words in *Babel* exposes the relationship between translation, power, and cultural exchange. Siddiqi's refusal to provide reader-directed translations and her use of Urdu phrases and unexplained Anglophone echo-pairs challenge the dominant gaze of translation and prompt readers to explore the nuances of non-European language without exoticisation. These narratives encourage an interrogation of White privilege, confront existing linguistic hierarchies, and emphasise the significance of listening to marginalised voices.

Tangentially in Kuang's *Babel* and overtly in Siddiqi's *The Centre*, the leitmotif of cannibalism serves as a compelling distillation of translation's cannibalistic nature. In *Babel*, the colonial system is likened to a cannibal unable to consume itself without self-destruction. This illustrates the empire's entangled reliance on the colonial assets it exploits for their linguistic skills at the Royal Institute of Translation known as Babel. Similarly, in Siddiqi's *The Centre*, cannibalism becomes an image for translation's exploitative underbelly, reflecting how dominant cultures ingest and extrude what they need from marginalised ones. The motif of cannibalism in both texts underscores the multifaceted nature of translation – as both a force of dominance and a site of potential resistance – emphasising a precarious balance between empowerment and erasure. Each text finds ways to literalise or materialise the exploitative operations of translation: as silver bars and as cannibalism. In other words, each novel moves into the speculative mode at the exact point that the violence of linguistic imperialism is depicted.

Kuang's *Babel* and Siddiqi's *The Centre* use their British settings of Oxford and London to illuminate the intersections between imperialism, race, and class. In *Babel*, Oxford is the symbolic and material space where language and colonialism converge. The Royal Institute of Translation, or Babel, functions as a microcosm of imperial power relations. Students from diverse backgrounds come to the famous university, where they negotiate linguistic hierarchies and confront the colonial project's connivance in translation. Professors Lovell and Playfair, neither loving nor playing fair, are the

embodiment of extractivist translation and spark Griffin's fiery critique of Babel's involvement in colonialism. Similarly, in *The Centre*, contemporary London is chosen deliberately as the launchpad for Anisa's meteoric rise as a translator when she starts working with European languages, highlighting the radically unequal translationship left by linguistic colonialism. Father to Arjun serves as the Centre's founder–director, is Shiba's father, and is known to be Anisa's admirer (probably, too, Arjun is the sexual partner whose behaviour distressed Anisa, as mentioned previously). This Indian man notes that he knew from the outset the Centre 'had to be in England, you see, to attract the kind of clientele that wouldn't have a problem with our rates' (221). In saying this, he draws attention to the economic and racial disparities inherent in language learning. The UK continues to benefit from inherited riches passed down through generations from imperialist spoils, and so the country's citizens make up the majority of the Centre's Learners. The other side of the coin is that the Storytellers, originally at least, are found among 'indentured labourers' (220) who are so desperately in debt that they would agree to any exploitative work.

These settings in London and Oxford thus reflect the broader issues of privilege, dominance, and the consequences of linguistic imperialism that both novels excoriate. The translation institute and the language centre are metonyms for the colonial centre, shutting out the linguistic peripheries and ending a tone-deaf ear to other cultures. Their residents speak with forked tongues when they profess that conventional translation works for the public good, since it actually perpetuates imperial practices. Indeed, Shiba reveals that the Centre's original poster advertisement featured a snake charmer in a turban luring from its basket a cobra 'made out of letters of the Hindi alphabet' (221). Like the snake, Shiba and her fellow Centre directors have a forked tongue when it comes to their rhetoric about translation and resistance while simultaneously pocketing and pandering to metropolitan money. Yet I have argued in this chapter that translation is also double-pronged, both perpetuating and challenging colonial legacies depending on who does it and how.

In her essay 'The Politics of Translation', Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (2009/1993, 200–225) explores translation as a deeply personal and homely act of reading. In doing so, she anticipates the locations of Kuang's and Siddiqi's novels in residential institutions for translators. Kuang's choice of setting in particular – this simultaneously heimlich and unheimlich Oxford – indicates translation's intimate connections to the characters' lives in both this new home and their homelands. Spivak's assertion that 'translation is the most intimate act of reading' underscores the 'surrender' to the text that occurs during the act of translation, a surrender that she likens to 'the erotic' (Spivak, 2009/1993, 201, 205). This idea resonates with the themes presented in *The Centre*, where Arjun draws attention to sexual cannibalism in the animal kingdom. He talks about the female consuming the male during or after copulation (242), even though in the world of the text it is he who

is the sexual predator. In the realms of sex and translation, there exists an inherent intensity and exchange, akin to a struggle for dominance or survival.

As I conclude this chapter, the arresting images of Yilin Wang's battle with the British Museum, the insurrectionary graffiti of *Homeland*'s dissenting artists, and especially Kuang's and Siddiqi's novels, invite us to reconsider the symbiosis between translation and colonialism. The chosen texts illuminate the complex, ongoing dialogue between language and power, urging readers to listen, question, and transform imperially shaped translations of the world.

Notes

1 In the 1830s, when *Babel* is set, this term was the one most commonly used. However, even today spoken Hindi and Urdu should not be viewed as two separate languages, because they are actually sister tongues. The language spoken in many parts of north India is Hindustani, a product of the syncretic culture of the Ganga-Jamuni region. As such, I will use this word on several occasions over the course of this essay when referring to the spoken language.
2 Subsequent references are to this (2022) edition of R. F. Kuang's *Babel* and will be cited parenthetically by page number in the text.
3 Note the unusual inclusion of two subtitles, '*Or, the Necessity of Violence*' and '*An Arcane History of the Oxford Translators' Revolution*'.
4 Interestingly, Kavita Bhanot and Jeremy Tiang (2022, 10) deploy a similar analogy to Britain's quest for spices, writing about translation that 'it's tempting to draw a parallel in response to ongoing colonial domination: colonial nations once set forth from centres of power to extract labour and resources from elsewhere, their ships returning laden with rare spices. Now the colonised are in a position to say: We are no longer willing to be your spice; we are asserting our own stories, sailing our own ships'.
5 There is even a footnote about footnotes (383).
6 Ironically, this character's name bears the stamp of Americanisation, since 'O'Nell' is most likely an Irish-American corruption of 'O'Neill'. As with the claim that 'chitty's' etymology lies in Marathi, the surname is probably a slip-up (this one marked by paddywhackery) on Kuang's part.
7 Subsequent references are to this (2023a) edition of Ayesha Manazir Siddiqi's *The Centre* and will be cited parenthetically by page number in the text.
8 Throughout the novel, Siddiqi uses title case for the Centre and the two main groups of people who attend it, namely 'the Storytellers' and 'the Learners', so I follow this usage.
9 I have been learning these languages much more slowly and painfully than students at the Centre, though the pain of gradual improvement brings with it more genuine pleasure than the endorphin rush of imperialist language collection which the novel dramaties as bringing 'emptiness' rather than fulfilment (168).
10 This is another knowingly self-referential allusion, since Siddiqi's (2022) essay about translation is entitled 'Preserving the Tender Things . . .'
11 S is an apt initial for this publisher, since in the Acknowledgements Siddiqi discloses that her British agent is called Sara Langham and her agent in the US is Stephanie Delman, her editor at Zando goes by Sareena Kamath, and she also thanks Sophie Jonathan and Salma Begum (along with Orla King) at Picador.
12 Naima again plays with multiple applications of polysemic phrases when she reassures Anisa about the strength of their friendship with the epigrammatic, 'It's all love, love' (285).

13 Kavita Bhanot was one of Siddiqi's editors for her 2022 essay about translation, and she along with most of the other first names are thanked in the Acknowledgements.
14 Since some of the friends are writers and/or theorists, the boundary between the two groups, too, is porous.
15 More problematically, given his complicated status as both probable victim and alleged perpetrator of sexual violence, Junot Díaz resisted the *New Yorker*'s italicisation of 'foreign' words (a tendentious thing to call Spanish in the US) in his stories, and the magazine abandoned the practice as a result (Walkowitz, 2021, 107).
16 The translator of Derrida's *Of Grammatology*, Gayatri Spivak, is another scholar with an interest in cannibalism, colonialism, and translation. Her analysis of the world writers Toni Morrison, J. M. Coetzee, and Wilson Harris in 'Politics and Translation' sheds light on various aspects of their work, including Harris's fascination with the Carib bone flute, which Spivak contextualises against the colonial trope of cannibalism (2009/1993, 220–221). In the subsequent chapter from *Outside in the Teaching Machine*, titled 'Inscriptions: Of Truth to Size' (2009/1993, 226–243), Spivak traces the impact of English being imposed upon (formerly) colonised individuals in various ways, like Bassnett and Trivedi drawing a parallel with medical transplantation – in Spivak's case, both in terms of language and the physical transplantation of organs, symbolising a hybridisation process.

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7

ARMED WITH WORDS

(De)colonising Translation in the US-led NATO War in Afghanistan (2001–2021)

Sara de Jong

> The interpreter is a soldier without a gun on the ground. If a soldier went anywhere, we went with them. We didn't have a weapon. But our weapon was our language skills.
>
> (Research interview, December 2021, UK)

With this description, Sayeed explains his fourteen years of work as an interpreter for the US and British armies in Afghanistan, which he started when he was twenty-three years old. Sayeed was one of the many Afghan interpreters who between 2001 and the Taliban take-over of Afghanistan in 2021 interpreted between Western soldiers and local communities, translated intercepted Taliban communication, and advised Western soldiers about culturally appropriate interactions with local political leaders. Described by the Taliban as the 'tongue and eyes' of Western armies, interpreters were vital to the international military engagement. They were 'core players in the counterinsurgency doctrine of "winning hearts and minds"' (De Jong, 2022b, 248) and were thus integrated into military practice, including patrols, house searches, interrogations and intelligence gathering, and military doctrine.

While research on interpreters in contemporary theatres of war is still an emerging field, the role, complicities, and resistance of historical local interpreters within imperial conquest and governance are well documented (see, for example, Hagedorn, 1995; Hinderaker, 2002; Irving, 2020; Rafael, 1993; Valdeón, 2013). Insights from this scholarship are relevant for understanding the complex position of contemporary interpreters in the neo-imperial wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and some scholars have directly made such links (De Jong, 2023a; Polezzi, 2022). Continuities between colonial and neo-colonial interpreters include their contentiously complicit role, their powerful yet

DOI: 10.4324/9781003351986-8

precarious position, and their mobility between the (neo)colony and (neo)colonial metropole. For instance, Hamid Dabashi has described contemporary Afghan and Iraqi interpreters as 'collaborators' who tell 'the conquering power what it needs to know in order to better dominate' (2011, 23). In a blog post written during August 2021 when former interpreters desperately tried to leave Afghanistan following the Taliban takeover, Rachel Mairs (2021, n.p.) drew on an analysis of the 'history of the elision and neglect' of Pashto language specialists in the Anglo-Afghan wars of the nineteenth century to conclude that 'the vulnerability of interpreters to reprisals for working with occupying military forces is as close to an historical constant as one can get'. Sayeed himself was among those evacuated in August 2021, and the interview from which the quote at the beginning of this chapter is taken took place in a cafe not far from the hotel where he was temporarily being accommodated with his family. He had become one of the many living examples of Ambalavaner Sivanandan's aphorism 'We are here, because you were there' (Sivanandan, qtd. in Gordon, 2014, 2). This slogan captures the link between imperial conquest and migration as well as migrants and refugees' defiant right claims based on this connection (see also Chapman, 2023).

Sayeed's statement that his language skills were his weapon needs to be understood in the context of historical continuities between neo-imperial wars and 'empires [which] used translation for creating and sustaining a system of coloniality and for governance, exploitation and conversion' (Demir, 2022, 57; see also Irving, 2020; Robinson, 2014). This chapter will develop the argument that attending to the translations by Afghan interpreters reveals more than neo-imperial weaponisation. Going beyond simplistic tropes of the translator as either morally good or bad (Polezzi, 2022), I align myself with studies that have shown 'the complexity of the colonial encounter [in] the ways in which culturally and linguistically grounded expectations and communicative needs complicate seemingly simple interchanges between colonizer and colonized' (Robinson, 2014, 97). Recognising the significance of coloniality for understanding the position of Afghan interpreters (Polezzi, 2022), I will deploy a postcolonial and decolonial framework to analyse a set of interpretative interactions between Afghan interpreters and international soldiers. The next section will introduce the decolonial and postcolonial approaches that underpin the empirical analysis. I will introduce the case study and methodology before presenting three decolonial translational challenges of interactions in (mis)translation. The first traces how a missed translation of a joke reveals the anxiety of Western soldiers and briefly uncovers and unsettles the hegemonic, hierarchical order. The second translational interaction in the interstices of neo-imperial warfare creates a space for an Afghan to articulate his distrust of Western soldiers, displacing the dominant distrust in the interpreter. It also momentarily centres the interpreter, who instead of speaking in the service of the international soldier, decides on the need to

silence him. The third decolonial translational challenge shows how Afghan interpreters seize on and return NATO's selective translation and co-optation of a Dari phrase with their own re-appropriation to demand protection and rights. This chapter argues that attending to the ways in which interpreters armed themselves with words opens novel avenues for understanding power, dependencies, and neo-imperial anxieties in the US-led NATO war in Afghanistan.

Postcolonialism, Decolonisation, and Translation

This chapter aligns itself with scholarly work that seeks to 'interrogat[e] postcolonial and neocolonial politics based on the combined contributions of postcolonial and decolonial thinkers' while at the same time recognising the distinct trajectories of and tensions between postcolonial and decolonial thought (De Jong, 2022c, 91). Translation, both as a means of colonial governance and domination and as a site of potential subversion, has long been a key area of investigation for postcolonial scholarship, perhaps unsurprisingly given that postcolonial scholarship first rose to prominence in humanities disciplines, such as (comparative) literature (Batchelor, Chapter 2, 36–51; Chow, 2008; Niranjana, 1992; Robinson, 2014; Spivak, 2006). By contrast, for leading decolonial scholars, translation has been less of a central issue (see for an exception: Mignolo and Schiwy, 2003). However, the works of other scholars who have been the source of inspiration for decolonial thinkers, such as those of Gloria Anzaldúa, have taken up questions of language, identity, and resistance in translation, both in the content of their writing and through its form. For instance, Anzaldúa's key book *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987) presents different languages alongside each other and, at certain points, deliberately refuses translation for the reader.

While postcolonial theory traces the legacies and ongoing effects of colonialism on the current world order by drawing on *deconstructive* methods, decolonial theory has been described as *constructive* (Asher, 2017, 523), making for 'a louder and more radical challenge, linked more directly to protest and direct confrontations with existing practice' (Noxolo, 2017, 342). The relationship between the noun 'decolonisation' and the verb 'decolonise' (Tuck and Yang, 2012) has no equivalent in postcolonial thought. In other words, postcolonial scholars cannot 'postcolonise', as their term negates the option of an 'exit' from the postcolonial condition. Instead, postcolonial scholar Spivak emphasises that 'nothing can be achieved without the acknowledgement of complicity, in the sense of being folded-together with the other side' (Spivak et al., 2022, 137–138). By contrast, in decolonial theory, the idea of 'delinking' is central, denoting the need to inhabit autonomous ways of thinking and being, *beyond* the modern/colonial mode (Mignolo, qtd. in Weier, 2017, 11). This 'delinking' is entirely antithetical to

postcolonial thought, considered both impossible and at risk of becoming a naively romanticising nativism (Spivak et al., 2022). However, even in decolonial thought there is a recognition that there are institutions, practices, and discourses which defy delinking.

This shared insight that some practices and institutions are inextricably colonial is crucial in the context of analysing translation by locally employed interpreters in Afghanistan. Local Afghan interpreters working for NATO and other forces were complicit in and, importantly, subject to neo-imperial violence (De Jong, 2022b; De Jong and Shajjan, forthcoming), from which their acts of translation cannot be delinked. Anthony King's assertion that 'the British Army is actively committing itself to a programme of "decolonization"' thus reflects a misguided understanding of decolonial thought (2021, 444). King has suggested that the British army 'is investigating its culture and history, with the aim not just of advancing the non-discriminatory, multicultural policy which it has pursued for the last two decades, but of embracing an explicitly anti-racist agenda' (2021, 444). This is questionable from an anti-racist perspective but would also be contested by decolonial scholars who have (rightly) insisted that decolonisation is not reducible to multicultural and anti-racist politics (Tuck and Yang, 2012). As Afghanistan veteran and author Joe Glenton (2020, n.p.) notes,

> it is hard to think of any organisation that would contest a reckoning with those grim facts [of colonialism] more strongly than the armed forces, whose foundational myths and imaginary are so entrenched in empire that the violence involved is still proudly recalled, and barracks are still named after the locations of crushed rebellions.

Beyond this lack of will, the notion of the decolonisation of (former imperial) armies presents a logical contradiction. Proclaiming that the British army is already being decolonised is not only an analytical error but also a political risk when 'we are witnessing a glib way of proclaiming all kinds of radical and progressive reckonings with colonialism while tightening the screws on a skewed, neoliberal, and necropolitical political systems' (Shringarpure, 2020, n.p.). The decolonisation of Western armies, their deployment of racialised citizens and non-citizens, and their international interventions would require its undoing in the present and past through abolition and reparation.

In this light, I suggest distinguishing between epistemic and liberatory aims in deploying decolonial theory. While alternative epistemologies and liberation struggles are interrelated and should be parallel aims where possible, I propose there are instances where there is value in the epistemic challenge of decolonial theory even where liberation is a logical impossibility. This is inevitably a much more limited and modest claim about decolonial critique

enabling alternative understandings of power, dependencies, and neo-imperial anxieties in the US-led NATO war in Afghanistan. Such an approach is reflected in Tarak Barkawi's article 'Decolonising War' (2016), which suggests that a decolonial or postcolonial war studies should dismantle the war/peace binary narrative and replace it with a battle/repression schema to bring into focus the continuum of violence enforced by empires. Unlike King's misguided claim about the decolonisation of the British army, Barkawi is not proposing that war itself can be decolonised. Instead, he shows that by decentring Eurocentric conceptualisations of war, the imperial rather than national foundation of many armies is brought into focus and the hierarchies implied in mainstream concepts such as 'small wars' revealed (Barkawi, 2016). In the analysis that follows, I will take inspiration from this epistemic aim of decolonial theory to decentre hegemonic accounts of the war in Afghanistan and employ postcolonial theory to highlight the ambivalences and anxieties of the postcolonial order.

Case Study and Methodology

The most extensive academic scholarship on interpreters in conflict zones comes from language and translation studies. This research is often based on secondary data, mostly from media sources (M. Baker, 2010; Collin, 2009; Footitt and Kelly, 2012, 2018; Gaunt, 2016; Gómez-Amich, 2018; Inghilleri, 2010; Rafael, 2007; Rosendo and Muñoz, 2017; Stahuljak, 2000; Tipton, 2019), with the exception of a few small-scale studies using a limited number of interviews as primary data (Gómez-Amich, 2018; Kremmel, 2016; Rosendo, 2020). Translation studies started engaging with this topic from the 2000s, as a response to the emerging media stories about interpreters in conflict (Footitt and Kelly, 2018). The field was also responding to a growing disciplinary interest in interpreters and their biographies (Kremmel, 2016), challenging professional orthodoxies within interpreting studies, such as the expectation that interpreters should be neutral, trained professionals (Gómez-Amich, 2018; Rosendo, 2020).

In addition to earlier work on interpreters in Bosnia-Herzegovina (C. Baker, 2010; Baker, 2012), there is an emerging subfield of social science studies on Afghan and Iraqi interpreters employed by international forces, some of which also attend to the practice of interpreting (Bos and Soeters, 2006; Campbell, 2016; Coburn and Sharan, 2016; De Jong, 2022b). For example, anthropologist Madeleine Campbell notes in her study of resettled former Iraqi interpreters who worked for the US army that they shared 'stories of mistranslating as a badge of . . . commitment to mutual understanding between Iraqis and Americans', crediting their 'mistranslation with potentially saving lives' (2016, 74; see also Hoedemaekers and Soeters, 2009). Geesje Bos and Joseph Soeters also attend to local interpreters' active role not simply in translating but rephrasing

soldiers' questions and statements, contrasting – rather simplistically – the directness of Western cultures with the more implicit and subtle communication of 'high-context cultures, mostly occurring in non-Western regions of the world' (2006, 264).

This chapter is based on forty-eight semi-structured interviews conducted between 2017 and 2022 with male Afghan interpreters who had worked for different international forces as part of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) (2001–2014) and Resolute Support (RS) (2015–2021) missions. They had been motivated by a combination of 'the desire to perform a male breadwinner role, sometimes coupled with curiosity about Western culture, adventurism, youthful ambition, and patriotic pride' to contribute to a better future for Afghanistan, which is not dissimilar to the motivations of Western soldiers, 'albeit in profoundly different material and structural contexts' (De Jong, 2022b, 253). For their protection, pseudonyms are used throughout. I also interviewed forty-two advocates and service providers in Australia, the US, the UK, Canada, France, Germany, the Netherlands, and Sweden. This included interviews with fourteen Afghanistan veterans who had become advocates for the protection and rights of Afghan interpreters, on which I will also draw in this chapter. Finally, the present work is shaped by informal relationships built over several years with Afghan interpreters and advocates through collective advocacy work and (participant) observation of advocacy, network, and support events. As the wider research concerns the claims to protection and rights by Afghan interpreters and activists, initially research participants were primarily selected based on their public profile and active political voice. Later interviews in the sample reflect snowball sampling and my own deepening connections with the Afghan interpreter and advocate community.

At the time of the interview, the Afghan interpreters were resettled or had come through asylum routes to the US, UK, Canada, France, Germany, or the Netherlands. The Taliban's targeting of local interpreters reflected Western soldiers' practical dependency on their linguistic skills and cultural awareness and local interpreters' symbolic status as 'mouthpieces' of the Western invasion. The threat level increased after August 2021 when the Taliban returned to power, as 'article 11 of Taliban's *Layeha* (code of conduct) orders the execution of individuals working for *Kofaar* (foreign infidels), including *Tarjoman* (interpreters)' (European Asylum Support Office, 2021, 60). Former interpreters that I interviewed were very aware that they were viewed by the Taliban as the 'tongue of the infidels', and some also noted that their work was contentious in Afghan society more broadly. Their stories reflected who their 'masters' were, as they tended to discuss their role as interpreters for international soldiers rather than considering the task of interpreting on behalf of the local population. This bias may also have been shaped by a political context in which Muslim refugee men have to actively 'translate themselves' as 'faithful' to the West(ern mission) (De Jong, 2024, 11). Moreover, the

quotes need to be interpreted in an interview context in which the interviewer was a non-Afghan researcher, with whom they spoke in the language of their employment (English, German, and Dutch).

Desire and Derision

I was perched on the backseat of former interpreter Naimat's car together with two Afghanistan veterans, when he told us about the day that he had to translate a joke made by a British army officer attending a meeting of local Afghan leaders. Naimat had just picked us up from the train station and was driving us to his house where he was hosting an event for other local Afghan interpreters resettled to the area, which we had co-organised with him. The former soldiers, Naimat and another interpreter sitting in the front of the car, had been taking turns sharing memories of interpreting interactions in Afghanistan when Naimat said to us:

> The officer told a joke and asked me to translate, but while I knew that his intention was to tell a joke, I had no idea what he meant! So, instead of trying to translate the joke, I just told the local leaders in the meeting: 'When I stop speaking, please start laughing as if you have just heard a very funny joke'. As soon as I was silent, all Afghans in the room burst out in laughter. However, rather than being pleased by the reception of his joke, the officer turned to me, looking uneasy: 'What exactly did you tell them? My joke wasn't *that* funny.'

I propose to draw on Homi Bhabha's (2001) insight that there is a proximity between desire and derision to understand the sense of discomfort experienced by the British soldier created by the unintended excess of laughter. Bhabha suggests that desire and derision come together in stereotypes of the colonial other, which are always contradictory and unstable. The colonial other is simultaneously mocked and wanted, creating a '*productive* ambivalence' (Bhabha, 2001, 389; emphasis in original). But as Kathryn Batchelor (2008) has noted, Bhabha also locates ambivalence in colonial power itself. In Naimat's story, instead of mobilising a colonial stereotype, desire and derision come together in the neo-colonial agent. The British officer, initially feeling in control, occupying a desirable position of power, instructs his interpreter to make a joke, seemingly to lighten the mood in an inevitably tense situation. However, as soon as the laughter returns in an unexpectedly vigorous form, he fears that the joke is at his own expense. Indeed, humour and comedy have long been forms of resistance by the colonised and marginalised, 'especially in contexts where overt opposition and public critique are dangerous' (Källstig and Death, 2021, 341).

Bhabha's interest in ambivalence, as Batchelor (2008, 62) observes, is key to 'his analyses of colonial power [which] stress its lack of stability and the potential for it to be undermined, either through the agency of the colonized (through devices such as mimicry) or through the contradictions built in to [*sic*] the colonial system'. Bhabha discusses mimicry, the imperfect imitation of the coloniser by the colonised, as mockery, which even though 'often enacted unconsciously by the colonized . . . exposes colonial power to ridicule' (Batchelor, 2008, 63). The collective wall of laughter by the Afghan local leaders and the interpreter, while well intended to meet the expectations of the British officer and potentially to save the face of the interpreter who 'failed' in his interpretation, ends up exposing the isolation and awkwardness of the British officer. Soldiers' humour 'is used in a range of ways to sustain group bonds' (Woodward and Winter, 2007, 69), and both Afghan interpreters and international soldiers emphasised local interpreters' ability to understand and produce banter as a sign of (conditional) inclusion in military brotherhood (De Jong, 2022b). That said, the failed transfer of the joke between the soldier and his interpreter, Naimat, exposes the division between them while simultaneously reinforcing the alignment between Naimat and the local political leaders. Translation, as Vicente L. Rafael has suggested, is always political in that it can either affirm or undermine the social order and its hierarchies of power. It is precisely because of this political force that there is also 'another possibility that haunts every communicative act: that at some point translation may fail and the social order then may crumble' (Rafael, 1993, 211). In Naimat's story, the moment where the British officer feels he may be the butt of the joke is when order and hierarchies are briefly revealed *and* unsettled.

Distrust and Displacement

A failed joke is also central to Jason's reflection on translation. Jason is a retired captain from Australia, who served for twenty years in the Australian Defence Force, including in Afghanistan, and founded the organisation Forsaken Fighters, which campaigns for the resettlement of Afghan interpreters who were contracted by the Australian army. Talking to me in a hotel lobby in Berlin, he recalls:

> I remember one of my first meetings there with a senior [Afghan] military commander . . . and I tried to make this joke in Farsi, and he [the Afghan military commander] wasn't laughing. And then, you know, he said something and my interpreter said to me [imitates an Afghan accent], 'Sir, please no more talking from you. I will do the talking now.' And I said, 'What do you mean?' And he said, 'You have a very thick Iranian accent.'

> And I was like, 'Are you serious?' And he's like, 'Yes, sir. He doesn't like you. He thinks you're an Iranian spy'.

Linguistic training for international soldiers was based on the idea that 'armed with rudimentary Arabic, Pashto, or Dari', they were 'capable of establishing rapport', which could be used for strategic purposes (Rafael, 2012, 59). Rather than establishing rapport, Jason's attempt to communicate a joke in Farsi is met with suspicion. This recalls the long-standing discussion in translation studies on the figure of the traitor–translator (*traduttore–traditore*). As Walter Benjamin (1973/1923) has famously described in 'The Task of the Translator', two key concepts for evaluating translations are 'fidelity' on the one hand and 'licence' or 'freedom' on the other. With the two being in tension, translation is always a form of treachery (Rafael, 2009). Importantly for this context, the translator as traitor also has an extra-linguistic, political meaning, as the relation between languages is hierarchical and interpreters are often employed in the service of power (Irving, 2020).

The Taliban viewed Afghan interpreters working for international forces as spies and traitors. In the words of one interpreter whom I interviewed in Germany: 'You will always be seen as a spy, and as a traitor. Because you're working with foreigners'. This reflects imperial relations in which to be enlisted as a 'mediator between cultures is, as the idiomatic expression *traduttore, traditore* would have it, to be a traitor – in particular, a traitor to one's native culture' (Chow, 2008, 570). The interaction described by Jason follows this pattern but simultaneously unsettles it. Where usually the interpreter is met with suspicion, Jason's failed translation invites a transfer of the suspicion onto himself, as the soldier. It also allows the Afghan senior commander to articulate his distrust of international soldiers within an accepted discourse of mistrust of Iranian political interests.

Iran has long been an overinvested signifier as liminal other, only separated from Afghanistan by porous boundaries. Afghanistan's 'colonial bordering' commenced in 1871 with the British mission 'to establish a boundary between Afghanistan and Persia in Sistan' (Manchanda, 2020, 80). As Nivi Manchanda notes, 'Afghanistan's first modern frontier was its Western border facing Persia, and thus it was against Persia, or present-day Iran, that Afghanistan was originally physically defined and topographically delineated' (2020, 80). Cross-border mobility, including forced migration, between the two countries has been common for a long time, with estimates suggesting that since August 2021 approximately one million Afghans have fled to Iran (UNHCR, n.d., n.p.). The relation between Afghanistan and Iran was further politicised in the context of the US-led invasion, with President Hamid Karzai's relationship with Iran being watched closely (Manchanda, 2020).

While symbolic boundary-drawing was considered essential in this political context, international armies ignored the differences between Iranian Farsi and Afghan Dari – 'linguistically similar, but distinct' (Rosendo, 2022, 25) – at their convenience when recruiting and training their own military linguists. Jason's reflections should therefore be read in the context of an institutional practice, which facilitated ignorance. Institutionally, Western armies lacked engagement with what White (1995, 336) recognises as the gaps and 'opacities' of *all* linguistic utterances, which the inevitably imperfect practice of translation demonstrates so clearly, thereby foreclosing the recognition of the need for learning. International soldiers could materially and symbolically afford this ignorance because of their hegemonic position, though instances such as the Iranian spy accusation could momentarily rupture this. Reflecting on this interaction, Jason admitted: 'I hadn't even thought about it, but where I learned [Farsi] was the ADF [Australian Defence Force] school of languages, and our teachers were Iranian. And so when they were teaching us to speak, I picked up their accent . . . and so I blurted this stuff out'.

As Lucía Ruiz Rosendo similarly notes in the context of the Spanish army, national (in contrast to local) interpreters 'were naturalised Spanish citizens who had left Iran for Spain as many as four decades previously. Some of them had taught Farsi to military personnel in Spain before being recruited as interpreters' (2020, 48). A couple of reports have emerged in recent years of Iranian dual nationals who had worked as national interpreters in Afghanistan, one for the UK, the other for the German army, who have been convicted for spying for Iran ('German Army Translator on Trial over Spying for Iran', 2020; Norton-Taylor, 2008). However – ironically perhaps – national interpreters, by virtue of their shared citizenship, acculturation, and proficiency in the international soldiers' languages, tended to be considered more trustworthy than local interpreters and were allowed access to meetings and documents requiring higher levels of security clearance (Rafael, 2012; Rosendo, 2020).

Affirmative Sabotage

When General David Petraeus assumed command over the coalition forces in Afghanistan in 2010, he used a Dari expression in his speech at the ceremony, an idiom which under his predecessor Stanley McChrystal had become a familiar saying for many international soldiers. Addressing Afghan politicians and commanders as well as ISAF and US forces, Petraeus stated: '[W]e will not hesitate to bring all assets to bear to protect you and the Afghan forces with which you are fighting shoulder-to-shoulder, SHONA-BA-SHONA' (2010). A few months later, he referred in his 'Ramadan greetings to the people of Afghanistan' to 'the enormous importance of the tasks that members of ISAF share with members of the Afghan National Security Forces – and, indeed, with all Afghan citizens – as we work together, shona

ba shona, to achieve our common goal of a secure and peaceful Afghan nation' (ISAF Public Affairs Office, 2010). Ten years later, the Doha withdrawal agreement between the US army and the Taliban, which led to the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan in August 2021, unilaterally sacrificed the so-called 'common goal of a secure and peaceful Afghan nation'. Again, the phrase 'shona-ba-shona' was heard but this time on the runway of Kabul airport where women forced into exile were singing the famous song 'Sarzamin i Man' (My Homeland), lamenting the loss of their homeland Afghanistan (Makoii, 2021). In this 1998 song, which gained renewed resonance among the latest generation of refugees, fleeing the Taliban regime following the withdrawal of international soldiers, Afghans stand shoulder to shoulder with 'sorrow'. The song opens with the following lines: 'I have become homeless | I have moved from one home to another | Without you, I have always been shoulder to shoulder with sorrow. . . My homeland, my only love, my existence. . . I can't live anywhere but in you | They stole your treasures to enrich themselves' (Makoii, 2021).

As Carter Malkasian observes, 'Americans used the Dari phrase shona ba shona (shoulder by shoulder) to characterize the spirit of cooperation, saying it over and over again' (2021, 230), and appropriation of the expression was also common among other ISAF soldiers. As Noah Coburn (2016) notes, ISAF staff even issued a 'shona-ba-shona medal' to loyal Afghan National Army soldiers and local leaders. In a statement recalling the trinkets offered to Indigenous peoples by imperial agents, a battalion commander quoted by Armstrong (2014, 219) explains: 'We gave – there's something called a shona-ba-shona medal that our brigade had. We gave medals, we gave coins, we gave a dang case of Pepsi'.

The deliberate use of certain phrases used during the intervention had an impact on how events were understood with 'ISAF's claims to be working "shona ba shona" or shoulder to shoulder with local Afghans reinforc[ing] the divide between "good guys" and "bad guys", and ignor[ing] the actual reality of the complex alliances that the intervention created', according to Noah Coburn (2016, 43). However, it is important to recognise that Afghan interpreters also deployed the shoulder-to-shoulder, 'shona ba shona' motto to decry their treatment and assert their rights to protection from the international forces. For instance, Mohammad, who himself had been resettled to the UK, raised the plight of interpreters who worked for the British army who were left in Afghanistan. He told me angrily: 'They [the UK government] don't even answer those guys who worked with them, shoulder to shoulder, on the ground'. Mukhtar, who worked for six years for the German army and who joined a German NGO advocating for the rights of Afghan local staff, vocalised his anger that his residence status was temporary and required renewal every year, unlike the legal status accorded to refugees. He asked rhetorically: 'Is it my fault that I worked for six years shoulder to shoulder with the German soldiers in Afghanistan?'

Recognising that the international mission had co-opted the Dari saying to demand and claim loyalty, Afghan interpreters – and some of their political allies – echoed the English phrase 'shoulder to shoulder' to expose the lack of loyalty of international forces. They engaged in acts of what Gayatri Spivak has called 'affirmative sabotage' (Spivak, qtd. in Dhawan et al., 2019, 69), drawing on their linguistic and discursive fluency in the language of the military mission (see also De Jong, 2023b). As she explains: 'The idea is of entering the discourse that you are criticising fully, so that you can turn it around from inside because the only way you can sabotage something is when you are working intimately with it' (Spivak, qtd in Brohi, 2014, n.p.). The strategy of affirmative sabotage is not a weapon of the weak, who need to take recourse to hidden methods for self-preservation (Scott, 2008). Instead, affirmative sabotage 'can only be done from a position of strength because the weak do not have the social ability to enter those discourses' (Spivak, qtd. in Brohi, 2014, n.p.).Or, as Spivak puts it elsewhere, 'When a Chinese guy said to me that you speak English well, because the British had their boots on your neck, I said "Brother, you are right. . . But the thing is, we defeated the English by loving the language. . . You turn it around"' (Dhawan et al., 2019, 69–70). Afghan interpreters inserted their demands of loyalty and protection into the hegemonic language imposed by their employers in recognition of its political potential rather than as a sign of submission.

Conclusion

I have presented an analysis of three interactions in the interstices of neo-imperial warfare. The first has decentred soldiers' banter, attending to how its (missed) translation slipped into a moment of mockery. The second showed how efforts to instrumentally and ignorantly use Farsi training to establish rapport backfired into creating further distrust. It also produced a moment where a local interpreter's task shifted from translation to the silencing of an international soldier. In the final interaction, I traced the way in which local interpreters responded to the selective translation and appropriation of a Dari phrase, with their own affirmative sabotage of the falsely equivalent English phrase, to demand their rights to protection.

Afghan local civilian interpreters employed by international forces operated in a space inextricably marked by and complicit with the logics and violence of coloniality. Analysis of the translation practices in a space that weaponises translation therefore needs to recognise the conditions that constrain the potential for subversion. As I have argued in this chapter, this does not preclude that interactions in translation can – at times – confront and undermine neo-colonial logics and relations. Drawing on postcolonial theory and decolonial theory's epistemic aims, this chapter has shown that attention to interpretative interactions can deepen and complicate understandings of

power and highlight neo-imperial dependencies, anxieties, and ignorance in the US-led NATO war in Afghanistan.

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8

TRANSLATION AS DECOLONIAL METHOD

On the (Un)translatability of Human Rights Demands and the Coloniality of Migration in Refugee Protest in Germany

Encarnación Gutiérrez Rodríguez

Introduction

> The auditory effect of multilingual utterances has an uncanny, double-edged quality as well: on the one hand, it suggests a corporate, global United Nations-speak, in which every message is beamed in simultaneous translation around the world, devoid of context and deceptively 'value free'; and yet, on the other hand, this auditory effect reveals how politically unneutral the rules of grammar and translation are, depending on how and where they are used.
>
> (Apter, 2001, 5)

In this epigraph, Emily Apter describes the tension between universal norms and localised discursive practices. She notes that a 'global United Nations-speak' operates on the assumption of a universal understanding of ethical values and moral norms. Yet the transmission of this value system globally requires a form of translation that acknowledges specific local systems of grammar and semantics. Apter discusses the need for a 'transnational translation' that acknowledges the multilingual world-specific geographical, political, and historical entrenchments and provides room for polyphony in translation. The argument of this chapter resonates with Apter's notion of 'transnational translation' but complicates it by considering the local power relations shaping multilingual utterances. Further, it looks at the attempts to translate universal concepts such as human rights at the everyday level within the context of the coloniality of migration[1] (Gutiérrez Rodríguez, 2018, 2023). Concretely, it addresses the vernacular translation of human rights voiced by actors of the migrant and refugee political struggles in Germany

DOI: 10.4324/9781003351986-9

and asks how their task of translation carries a decolonising potential. Following this analysis, this chapter engages with translation as a decolonial method in refugee protest movements in Germany. It looks at how these actors translate their human rights demands within a context characterised by processes of dehumanisation and the restriction of human rights. Shaped by the logic of the coloniality of migration, asylum and migration control policies are determined by what Sylvia Wynter (2003) defines as the paradox of modernity: the creation of the dichotomy of the human/nonhuman. This chapter explores this paradox by relating it to Hannah Arendt's (1962) observations on the aporia of human rights. Arendt notes that refugees hold a position of exteriority to the community of national citizens. As such, their access to human rights, while prescribed by the promise of shelter from political persecution, is confined by asylum control policies, undermining this right.

When human rights claims are raised during refugee protests in Germany, as I argue in this chapter, a similar analysis is shared on the discrepancy between the ideal of universal human rights and the lack of its actual implementation. Translating human rights on the grounds of material and existential conditions, I examine the ethical dimension of human rights on the grounds of real living conditions. On this basis, I define the ontological (existential) and material (societal) dimensions of human rights within a precise historical and social conjuncture. This vernacular interpretation of human rights turns the abstraction of rights into a concrete level of experience. In the case of asylum and migration control policies, the promise of universal human rights is overshadowed by the system of the coloniality of migration, hindering its realisation. Conceiving asylum and migration control policies as embedded within the framework of the coloniality of migration requires working with the limitations of the translatability of human rights.

Set within political struggles against the coloniality of migration and its necropolitical violence (Mbembe, 2003), the vernacular translation of human rights carries a decolonising potential. It indicates what lies behind the proclamation of human rights and its destruction while also deriving from practices of anti-colonial resistance. It is this ambivalence between violence and resistance that is reflected in the tension of translatability and untranslatability of human rights claims in migrants and refugees' protests in Germany. This argument is developed in this chapter in three parts. First, I will engage with translation as decolonial method by tracing the tension between translatability and untranslatability. Second, I will look at the translatability of human rights within the context of its negation amid the coloniality of migration. Third, I will unfold this argument by paying attention to the acts of translation in migrant and refugee protest movements in Germany. The focus will lie here on everyday understandings of human rights in these political protests, uncovering the vernacular interpretation and decolonising potential

of translation. The article concludes with some observations of translation as decolonial method.

Translation as Decolonial Method: On (Un)translatability

The practice of translation serves as a tool of communication. It enables the transfer of one system of meaning to another one. The act of translation attempts to create the readability of one's perception of things, people, and the world in a setting with multiple language registers. Working through different idioms, syntax, grammar, and semantics, the act of translation attempts to create a legibility of things, people, and worlds from one idiomatic context to another. However, the act of translation seeks not to recreate a copy of the original text or utterance. It is rather an elaboration in a dialogic process among the reader, speaker, writer, listener, and interpreter (all united in the figure of the translator) of the text or utterance. Thus, speech acts are situated within a historical, geographical, social, and cultural context of emergence, as are the acts of translation. The translation requires that we know the cultural predication of the social system into which the text is translated, and the one from which the text derives.

As Benjamin (2002) advises us in 'Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers', the task of the translator begins where the limits of the understanding of the written word starts. Paying attention to the limits of translation, when a text exceeds the hermeneutic horizon of its reader and translator, Benjamin pays attention to the experience of the impossibility of translation. Thus, the act of translation operates along the simultaneous moments of potential (translatability) and its limits (untranslatability). Benjamin asserts that a good translation evolves in this tension and escapes the attempt of literal translation by working around the contours of the text. This translation work requires that the translator acknowledge the limits of translation and work around the text's gaps, silences, and incongruences. At the same time, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (2000) notes that the translator works with a language that belongs to many. In the act of translation, therefore, listening to the voice of the other is paramount. In fact, for Spivak, the imperative of translation is 'the act of hearing-to-respond' (2000, 22). Thus, every speech act is an utterance in response to a hearing. The act of translation evolves in response to the other's utterance in its difference.

Following Jacques Derrida (1985, 2001), translation unfolds in the interplay with differences and through the deference of meaning. Derrida defines this dynamic as différance, the translation process as a constant working through differences and deference. The 'a' in différance marks the relational arbitrary process of meaning production, the supplement meaning, indicating the rupture in the normative structure – the logocentrism – of the text. Thus, the translation task invites us to work along the multiplicity of meaning in

the text and in dialogue with our own hermeneutical and linguistic horizons. In Derrida's sense, translation is about translatability – the act of translation. Deborah Goldgaber (2018) draws our attention to the ambivalences in the tasks of translation when she discusses Derrida's notion of translatability. Embracing Benjamin's differentiation between language (signifying modality) and matter (signified object), Derrida's translatability focuses on the iterability or 'generalised iterability' that 're-describe meaning-effects (of all kinds) in terms of translation' (Goldgaber, 2018, 151). This perspective emphasises the 'inter-modal' nature of translation (Goldgaber, 2018, 151) as an interface between language, context, and the task of translation. Following Goldgaber, the 'task of the translator involves waking up language – or unfolding or decompressing the patterns stored in language – and putting language to work, in order to make one language resonate in another' (2018, 151). According to her, Derrida's understanding of translation embraces Benjamin's attention to what drives language beyond its established meaning. Thus, 'no translation would be possible if in its ultimate essence it strove for likeness to the original' (Benjamin, 2002, 73). Translation is not about the appropriation of the other's voice; it is about hearing the other and formulating a response. Going back to Spivak (1993, 179), it is about 'a simple miming of the responsibility to the trace of the other in the self'. The task of translation bears the responsibility of the translators to 'the trace of the other' (Spivak, 1994, 21) in its radical difference to themselves.

Moving away from the self–other dyad, translation as belonging to a multiplicity of voices shifts our perspective on the historical and socio-political setting in which translation occurs. Within the context of the coloniality of migration, in the struggles of migrants and refugees against necroborders and the dehumanising effects of asylum and migration control policies, the task of translation works with a multiplicity of interpretations of human rights. Translating human rights within the framework of the coloniality of migration evinces a societal system, in which forms of governance are established that lead to a structural exclusion and negation of human rights. Otherwise, the translation of human rights within this context evokes other epistemologies of justice, highlighting communitarian understandings and reciprocal ways of living together. Embedded within a political project investigating the continuation of colonial rule in the governance of asylum and migration, translation as a decolonial tool is attentive to epistemic violence but also to moves of liberation.

Accordingly, the act of translation implies not only working with someone else's text but also interrogating the relationships of power in place allowing or hindering this dialogue. As I have discussed elsewhere (Gutiérrez Rodríguez, 2006, 2008, 2010), global inequalities and (post)colonial relationships shape the conditions of communication and exchange. The positionality of the translator and the speaker does not exist in a vacuum of power relations;

instead, it is shaped by social hierarchies and relationships replete with power imbalance. The act of translation engages with societal negotiations in the struggle for cultural hegemony and meaning production. Translations are outcomes of historically and socially situated struggles between subaltern and hegemonic positions for knowledge authority.

Translation as a decolonial method derives from the tension between hegemonic writing and multiple subaltern and vernacular practices of interpretation, speaking, signifying, and bringing into meaning. It involves working around and through gaps, incongruencies, inconsistencies, multiplicity, and assemblages. Ultimately, this relational understanding of translation leads us to see the creation process of resistant common knowledge. In this vein, decolonial translation aims at acknowledging and being accountable for what is silenced, marginalised, or obscured in the hegemonic speech. Decolonial translation poses the question of how to navigate the various understandings set in relation by paying attention to ethical responsiveness. Tanja Dreher and Anshuman A. Mondal (2018) note that ethical responsiveness addresses the act of listening, witnessing, and attending. The act of translation is thus embedded in interactive listening. It derives from the dynamic of what Spivak (1994, 57) perceives as the 'responsibility' that 'must bind the call of the ethical to a response'. Thus, as she notes, the 'staging of rhetoricity in any text, verbal or otherwise, is the staging of the rhetoricity of the world as we know it, played by a planetary world-machine we cannot "know"' (2021, n.p.). Working through translation implies a hearing-to-response that considers a critique of the rhetoricity of the text. In this vein, translation attends to a double move. It critiques the conceptual framework through which reality is being perceived. For the question of the vernacular translation of universal human rights within the context of the coloniality, this means uncovering the systematic production of death, incarceration, impoverishment, deprivation, and exclusion of fundamental rights for persons subjected to migration and asylum control policies, conditioning the speech act and the act of translation. The translation of human rights discourses evolves here between a normative presumption of the universality of human rights and its systemic negation.

Context of Translation: Human Rights and the Coloniality of Migration

Asylum and migration policies delineate the boundaries in which exceptions to the entitlement to human rights are established. Through migration and asylum policies, populations are categorised along various residency permits. Migrants are constructed through these technologies of differentiation in a hierarchical system, determining their access but also limitations to fundamental citizens' rights such as access to work, housing, food, health,

education, and political participation. On these grounds, fundamental human rights, such as family reunification or individual mobility, are put on hold, undermined, or negated. However, not all migrants are targeted by the same measures of human rights restrictions. Highly skilled migrants employed by companies will probably have the possibility of family reunification if the employer views it as a recruitment incentive. Thus, the access to fundamental human rights depends on the migration status in conjuncture with nation-state's economic demands and political interests. For skilled migrants who are sought after in the national labour market or for citizens from nation-states with established immigration agreements, including European Union member states, Canadian citizens migrating to the United States, or British citizens to Australia, the norms and regulations of immigration to these countries are connected to historical relations of colonial ruling, imperial power, or contemporary socio-political economic conjunctures.

In the case of North America and Australia, the establishment of settler colonial states influenced the immigration policies in specific ways (Jupp, 2002; Knowles, 1997). For example, immigration from the former colonial ruling states, such as from the United Kingdom to Canada, the United States, Australia, or South Africa, is construed by this history, giving citizens of these states a privileged position as immigrants to these territories. Meanwhile, citizens of postcolonial nation-states face harsh barriers and legal impediments in their attempt to enter the European Union as migrants or refugees. Interstate relationships between former colonial powers and colonised territories take a prominent role in the administration of migrants and control of borders. As pivotal agents in the control of borders, the deportation of migrants and their internment in refugee camps or displacement in other countries of the region (for instance, in Morocco, Mauritania in the case of Spain, or in Libya and Tunisia in that of Italy), this inter-state governance of migration is reminiscent of colonial ruling. Moreover, coloniality informs the social structures of these territories. Countries of emigration from the southern peripheries are often characterised by having a societal structure determined by forms of intersectional violence that is expressed in systematic genocides, feminicides, and continuous wars, combined with raw capitalist racial and cisheteropatriarchal exploitation and structural debt accumulation. Forms of resource and land extractions, connected to cycles of terracide and ecocide, are sedimented, leading to social abandonment and necropolitical forms of reproduction through which the structural conditions for forced displacement, emigration, and flight are generated.

Immigration policies within the European Union disregard this migration–coloniality nexus (Gutiérrez Rodríguez, 2023), manifested in the entanglement of global inequalities and their local manifestations (Gutiérrez Rodríguez and Reddock, 2021). Demands for reparative justice, for example, in the Caribbean (Beckles, 2013), have raised attention to colonial continuities and

their effects on contemporary societies. Nonetheless, these demands for distributive economic and legal retributions are not registered in current asylum and migration control policies. Instead, mechanisms of asylum and migration control reinforce enduring colonial hierarchies and contribute to racist social segregation. Under these circumstances, the translatability of the universal character of human rights is confronted with an inability to spell human rights under the circumstances of their negation.

When the analysis of the coloniality of power (Quijano, 2000, 2008) is applied to asylum and migration control policies, as I previously stated, the modus operandi organising this field is that of the coloniality of migration. The legal categorisation established by migration policies between citizens and migrants but also among migrants, evokes a colonial matrix of differentiation. In the case of Germany, the legal residency categories resulting from the asylum system are currently summarised as: asylum seeker, asylum applicant, asylum rejected, and state-recognised refugee. When an asylum application is rejected, deportation can be avoided because of health issues or danger to life. In Germany, this status is legally defined as 'Duldung'. The status of 'Duldung' opens up the possibility of settling in the country. Yet the threat of 'Abschiebung', deportation, still prevails in the case of 'Duldung' and can happen at any time, anywhere. The German state has recently been considering whether to give refugees with 'Duldung' a fixed-term or permanent residency status. Obtaining the status of a migrant with a fixed-term or permanent residency status draws our attention to another system of immigration regulation: the demands for workers in the national labour market. Since the passing of the New Pact on Asylum and Migration by the European Parliament and the Council in December 2023, Germany and other European Union member states are implementing new control devices to limit refugees' access to their territory (see Human Rights Watch, 2023 and German Government, 2023). This is being realised through the establishment of control hubs at EU borders, assessing asylum applications within twelve weeks, and accelerating deportation procedures. Another idea is to provide a system of swift deportability by extending the radius of action of migration agencies and other agencies as well as access on a national scale to mass accommodations, in which refugees are held during their asylum-seeking process (Pro Asyl, 2023, n.p.). These measures demonstrate the negation of human rights and raise questions about their untranslatability within this context.

Refugee and migrant residency status, as we have seen, outline different positionalities within a social hierarchical classification system, denoting a scale of decreasing human rights or their absence. In other words, the logic of the coloniality of migration, reflected in the asylum and migration control system, is characterised by a stratified system of regulation, ending for some migrants and refugees in the nullification of human rights. The Western liberal understanding of human rights as an expression of a subject's autonomy

and individual freedom is turned here to its opposite, the suppression of individuality and independence. The reference to human rights within the migrant and refugee protest in Germany emerges within this context of the coloniality of migration. Instead of explicitly speaking about human rights, these activists shed light on the processes of dehumanisation they are subjected to by asylum and migration control and punishment devices. They refer to what Frantz Fanon (1986/1952) and Sylvia Wynter (2003) discuss as the nexus between human and nonhuman or the parallel existence of two mutually constituting moments of Western modernity: those of the zone of the human and the zone of the nonhuman.

These zones, as Wynter (2003) clarifies, are governed by processes of annihilation, genocide, enslavement, and raw capital extraction and workforce exploitation. It is this process of subjugation and objectification that Aimé Césaire (1950/2000, 42) discusses as 'thingification', the 'relations of domination and submission . . . turn the colonizing man into a classroom monitor, an army sergeant, a prison guard . . . and the indigenous man into an instrument of production'. In other words, Aimé Césaire defines thingification as a process rooted in the zone of non-being, in which the living and productive potential of human beings are (ab)used under conditions of enslavement and colonialism. At this threshold of human and non-human divide, the struggles for human rights by migrant and refugee political groups, reinstate the resistance to the state's attempt at subjugation, control, and, ultimately, dehumanisation through their acts of translation.

Acts of Translation: Challenging Human Rights

Over the last two decades, the question of the translatability or untranslatability of human rights has been raised at instances when party politics have set the agenda of public debates on asylum and migration restrictions. Since its inception in late 1980s Germany, the migrant and refugee protest movements have raised their voice against the dehumanising effects of these policies and publicly intervene on questions of human rights. Referring to the legal figure of the 'refugee', introduced globally during the first world war by the Commission for Refugees under the League of Nations in 1921 (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh et al., 2014; Gatrell, 2013; Mayblin, 2017) and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights established in 1948, they have drawn attention to the right to asylum in Article 14, enshrined as a fundamental right in the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Germany (Oltmer, 2002). As we will see in what follows, this protest has intervened in the political field of human rights by addressing the exclusion of migrants and refugees from those rights. Within this context, considerations about the translatability of universal human rights have surfaced.

In the early 1990s, as a response to mass and incessant racist attacks and murders of racialised and migrantised persons in Germany, several communities subjected to asylum and migration control policies mobilised themselves politically, publicly voicing their demands for human and citizenship rights (Odugbesan and Schwiertz, 2018; Gutiérrez Rodríguez and Tuzcu, 2021; Gutiérrez Rodríguez, 2023). These activists began collaborating with the emerging social movement of refugees in Western Europe (Nyers and Rygiel, 2014). Motivated by the Sans Papiers movement in France, Spain, Italy, and Belgium (Abdallah, 2000; Cissé, 1997), people with precarious or no regular migration residency status started to get organised. In 1994, the 'Caravan for the Rights of Refugees and Migrants' was convened in Thuringia, drawing attention to the inhumane living conditions of refugees in the Lager (internment camps) and the effects of asylum policies severely curtailing free movement, food sovereignty, access to the labour market, health, professional training, and advanced education. On these grounds, the Caravan campaigned against deportation and social exclusion (The Caravan of Migrants and Refugees, 2012; The Voice, 2014). At the beginning of the millennium, a group of undocumented migrant households and care workers publicly addressed their situation. With the advocacy group Respect, they organised campaigns for labour rights for undocumented migrants and their legalisation (Schultz, 2001). These actors amplified the universal human rights discourse by accentuating social justice and collective rights. Their definition of human rights transcended liberal notion of individual freedom and instead foregrounded community-oriented notions of justice. Human rights were thus translated on two levels: (a) the vernacular, by emphasising the right to have rights, and (b) by decolonising hegemonic individualistic interpretations of human rights.

Vernacular Translation: The Right to Have Rights

Analysis of the contradictions between human rights' normative claims and their implementation within asylum and migration control policies has been at the centre of self-organised migrant and refugee political groups. The externalisation of European Union borders to countries in North Africa, for example, has raised human rights infringement issues that have been debated in the European Court of Human Rights (ErCHR). In particular, the European Court of Human Rights case of 13 February 2020, the *N.D. and N.T vs. Spain* judgement, evinces that human rights are disputable (Carrera, 2020). ErCHR concluded in this case that the expedited expulsion to Morocco by Spanish authorities at border fences in Melilla did not amount to a violation of the prohibition against collective expulsions under Article 4 of the European Convention of Human Rights (ECHR) (Progin-Theuerkauf, 2020). This judgement legitimises the mass deportation of refugees

who jumped the fence to Spain in 2020, on the grounds that they did not use their individual right to apply for asylum. Their attempt to cross the fence to Spain was defined as an 'illegal entry' and as such considered a violation of migration law. It is important to note that extraterritorial enclaves like Ceuta and Melilla have specific rules of entry for non-EU members to Spain (Calderoni, 2019). Refugees and migrants arriving from other parts of Africa or from the Middle East or other extraterritorial regions of the EU are exposed to severely restrictive laws of entry in these enclaves, despite having entered EU territory.

The problematisation of the failure in the protection of human rights in the case of *N.D. and N.T vs. Spain* reveals its colonial entanglement. If we analyse this case from a decolonial angle, we notice a differential and circumstantial interpretation of human rights. While Article 4 of the European Convention of Human Rights explicitly condemned mass expulsion, the specific circumstances of entering the EU borders by climbing the fences are legally interpreted by ECHR as a violation of asylum and immigration regulations. This perspective omits the fact that applying for asylum is tied to specific legal requirements, linked to the proof of persecution. In political circumstances, where the person attempting to apply for asylum is escaping or hiding from violence, the reconstruction of the events, facts, and persons causing harm represents an unrealisable hurdle, as it is bound to a further potential experience of state or group violence. The access to the realisation of human rights is in this case restricted by migration control policies, operating within the differential hierarchical categorisation system of the coloniality of migration. Distinguishing between circumstances of legitimate and illegitimate access to the right to asylum or immigration, the historical, geographical, political, and economic circumstances shaping the legal entitlement to these rights are not reflected and taken into account by a legal interpretation, disregarding the (post-)colonial political and existential conditions shaping the point of entry regarding asylum and immigration rights as well as human rights. Concretely, in the case of Spain, persons categorised as 'illegal migrants' do not enjoy the same degree of guaranteed human rights as Spanish citizens. For them, mass deportation, considered by the European Human Rights convention a human rights infringement, can be legitimised on the grounds of national immigration law.

In the problematisation of the legal interpretation of different scales of individual freedom, the entanglement between human rights and the coloniality of migration becomes explicit. The differentiation between Spanish state members and 'foreigners' (non EU-citizens), who must be prevented from entry the EU, confines the universal character of human rights (Sagnella, 2020). Arendt's critique of the aporia of human rights and 'the right to have rights' elucidates this argument further. As Arendt notes, 'the right to have rights, or the right of every individual to belong to humanity, should be guaranteed by

humanity itself' (1962, 298). This right, as Arendt argues, is not guaranteed 'by reciprocal agreements and treaties between sovereign states' (1962, 298). Seyla Benhabib (2012/2004) draws our attention to the fact that Arendt elaborates upon this argument in her analysis of imperialism from *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1962). Working on the effects of European colonialism and imperialism in Africa, Arendt observes the establishment of a differential law system, creating what she describes as the 'end of the rights of man' (1962, 267). The abolishment of civil rights for the enslaved and colonised population in British colonial rule over India or in French-colonised Egypt exposes a legal system of subjugation and objectification whose aim is to legitimise the 'instrumentalisation of the nation-state for the plundering greed of the bourgeois classes' (Benhabib, 2012/2004, 52). This systematic disregard for human rights culminates for Arendt in the state practices of denaturalisation in the first and second world wars, exemplified in particular by the situation of Jewish refugees that led to the creation of national minorities, refugees, and stateless and displaced persons. These categories, as Benhabib (2012/2004, 54) argues, 'are special categories of human beings created through the actions of the nation-state'. Arendt's explanation of 'the right to have rights' results within this context of systematic exclusion from an 'organised political and legal community' (1962, 57). This community is constituted by interdependent relations, based on civil and political rights as well as reciprocal obligations as 'consociates of a community' (1962, 57). Based on this observation, Benhabib raises the question of the moral claims that refugees or immigrants themselves advance when addressing their own rights. As I will argue in the following, in light of continuous human rights infringements within the European Union (Bast et al., 2022), reflected in the aggravation of already economically and socially uncertain living conditions of people with an irregular migrant or refugee residency status in the EU, the question of human rights brings to the fore who is considered a subject for acquiring rights.

When it comes to the case of undocumented migrants and refugees, this irregular legal status is determined by the absence of fundamental citizen rights. The right to have rights continues to be a site of struggles, as rights must be demanded and fought for. The entitlement to political participation and to civil rights, as Arendt argues, should be guaranteed to all as members of humanity and society as such (Gündoğdu, 2015; Salih, 2018; Martinez and Elliot, 2022; Riva and Hoffstaedter, 2021). The right to have rights is tied to the juridical entitlement of any human being, regardless of their status, to be treated with dignity and respect. Yet, as Arendt's discussion of the aporia of human rights invites us to consider, the realisation of the universal claim of human rights is particularised or impeded through asylum and migration control policies, regulating legal membership in the nation. This limits the translatability of liberal human rights on a universal level and exposes the untranslatability of human rights within the context of asylum

and migration control policies, where the realisation of the constitutional fundamental rights to housing, education, health, and work for all is disputed, restricted, or negated for the population subjected to them.

In sum, the implementation of human rights is conditioned by two factors: (a) membership in the nation-state and (b) inter-state relationships guaranteeing civil, political, or citizen rights. Human rights are discursively differentiated on three levels: universal, fundamental, and subjective (von Harbou, 2014). Universal human rights are a moral imperative, an ethical premise that is connected to the conviction that each human being should have the right to a dignified life. This is true regardless of whether human rights belong to a particular group by virtue of their humanity (MeDiMi, 2023) or, as we have seen from Arendt's work, as an expression of political subjecthood. Human rights posit the belief in humanity as a moral community of care and respect. Yet, as we have seen, this universal understanding is limited by citizenship and migration legislations, defining on the one hand membership and on the other exclusion from the nation-state. Migrant and refugee protests address these dynamics of inclusion and exclusion, while they also analyse and critic the hierarchical differentiations established by these legal norms. Through this political work, these movements advance the dispute on human rights to centre stage in their activism by enacting their fundamental and subjective human rights to free movement, autonomous living, and cooperative relations of social reproduction. Further, they elaborate rooted notions of human rights and justice, embedded in their struggle and understanding of communities of resistance. Arendt's right to have rights is here enacted through the building of convivial support networks, working on the ethical principles of reciprocity and planetary responsibility. It is through this collective practice that human rights are critically examined at the juncture of the migration–coloniality entanglement.

Decolonial Interpretations: Beyond Human Rights

Building on decades of work by self-organised refugee groups such as the Caravan for the Rights of Migrants and Refugees,[2] the Voice Refugee Forum[3] (in what follows, the Voice), Women in Exile[4] (Women in Exile and Gürsel, 2013; Women in Exile, 2022), International Women's Space[5] (2022), and many other groups, a strong refugee movement emerged in Germany from 2011/2012 onwards (Ataç, 2013; Bhimji, 2016, 2020; Doppler, 2021; Mokre, 2015). In 2013 a broad refugee strike was organised that occupied churches and public squares in Austria and Germany. In particular, the Voice's tireless efforts to build contacts with refugees in the 'Lager' secluded state accommodations for refugees in the outskirts of cities and villages, was decisive for the success of this mobilisation. In Bavaria, for example, this led to the organisation of a group of exiled Iranians, who launched campaigns against

inhumane housing and proposed to abandon the human rights debate in light of a prioritisation of citizen rights (Doppler, 2021; on the broader European dimension of the movement, see King, 2016; Stierl, 2019). Members of this movement opted for the self-definition of 'non-citizens' to emphasise the exclusion from political participation (Dosthossein and Nasimi, 2020). Addressing the limits of the translations of human rights within the context of asylum and migration control policies, the reference to 'non-citizen' formed the basis of a critique of human rights as an abstract category, disconnected from the material conditions of existence of persons who were subjected to asylum legislation. Stating that neither human nor civil rights are taken as given or conclusive, these movements performatively enacted their democratic rights through their political actions (Rancière, 2004).

As we have seen, within the context of asylum and migration control policies, human rights are constrained due to legally imposed limitations to free movement, coupled with forms of state-supported internment and encampment in secluded refugee accommodations ('Lagers') and the restrictive regulation of access to social and political rights for persons in the asylum-seeking process. When the activists of the migrant and refugee protest movements refer to human rights in this context, they denounce the negation of those rights (Ulu, 2013). Their demands for human rights expose the limitation in the application of these rights. Set within this field, the translation of universal human rights is turned to its limits. While human rights are translated in this field by the activists, the language of asylum and migration control policies in which this translation occurs addresses its inexistence. The translation of human rights results in the stating of its negation and dehumanisation. The translation of human rights is caught in a dialectical move. While the activists for human rights are working on the translation of the universality of this claim, the grammar (asylum and migration control policies) in which this translation occurs produces its negation. The translation of human rights is answered by its factual untranslatability. Behind the promise of human rights within the context of the coloniality of migration – here spelled out by the effects of asylum and migration control policies on the persons subjected to them – stands the subjugation of the colonised other – the creation of a rightless subject, contained and deciphered in categories such as 'undocumented migrant', 'asylum-seeker', or 'refugee'. Asylum and migration control policies reduce human beings to bodiless unities of governance, depleting them of any individuality, agency, wisdom, or creativity. From Césaire's standpoint, they become 'thingified'. The terms 'refugee' or 'migrant' reduce human beings to control, administration, and regulation devices.

Interfering in the field of migration governance, the migrant and refugee protest movement interrogates the endurance of colonising effects produced by asylum and migration control policies. As such, these activist movements offer an analysis of the coloniality of migration. Their protest addresses the

limitation of the translatability of human rights and draws attention to the processes of dehumanisation produced by these policies. The translation of human rights in the field of asylum and migration control policies evolves within the paradox of translatability and untranslatability. Thus, while the protest movements are constantly attempting the translation of human rights, they are confronted with policies of dehumanisation. The translation of human rights in the field of migration and control policies by these actors results in the semantic field of asylum and migration control policies in its negation. The outcome of this translation is not the equivalent of human rights but its opposite, dehumanisation. The translatability/untranslatability of human rights within the context of the coloniality of migration uncovers the coloniality of human rights (Maldonado Torres (2017). In particular, the Voice sets the connection between (neo)colonial relations and global inequality at the forefront of anti-colonial struggles against European asylum and migration restrictions. Slogans such as 'We are here because you destroyed our countries' or analysis of deportation as a neo-colonial and necropolitical practice (Mbembe, 2003) translate the limits of human rights imposed by asylum control policies (The Caravan of Migrants and Refugees, 2009; Bendix, 2018; International Women* Space, 2018a and 2018b).

Conclusion: Decolonial Translation

The translation of human rights navigates between two poles, those of (a) translatability and (b) untranslatability. While the ethical condition of human rights is translated as a universal value, persons subjected to migration control policies experience exclusion of these rights. Human rights' translatability is turned upside down when met with the existential circumstances of dehumanisation. Thereby, human rights as a universal value is translated, but the meaning system it encounters demonstrates its own inexistence. The translation of human rights results in the pronunciation of dehumanisation. The meaning system of universal human rights is crisscrossed by the logic of the coloniality of migration, articulating the untranslatability of human rights. In the double bind of translatability and untranslatability, translation as a decolonial method seeks to interrogate the grammar of human rights by broadening the semantics of justice. It challenges the focus of human rights on the individual by expanding its scope to the community and planetary understandings of rights. Moreover, it interlinks claims for rights with material demands for distributive and reparative justice when, for example, human rights are critiqued from the perspective of the legally prescribed non-citizen. Articulations such as the 'right to stay for all' speak to this (un)translatability of human rights by evoking the commons as the main addressee of the performative political enactment of autonomy, emancipation, and liberation.

In conclusion, it can be stated following Neil Stammers (1999) that social movements are significantly involved in politically addressing and translating rights, in particular human rights, as a vehicle for a potential realisation of justice. Further, these movements are critical actors in the public analysis of structural injustice. The translation of human rights in migrant and refugee protest movements addresses the limits of the discursive and material implementation in the context of asylum and migration control policies. The (un)translatability of human rights within this context is driven by its immanent contradiction, based on the proclamation of universality and the limitation of its fulfilment. Long-rooted social divides and hierarchies are actualised in and through translation, revoking the structural and epistemic coloniality that configures contemporary asylum and migration control policies. Social movements of refugees and undocumented migrants and their advocacy groups address this contradiction between the promise of universal human rights and its factual failure of realisation whilst tracing new trajectories of enacting alternative understanding of human rights and justice in translation. As such the potential of translation as a decolonial tool lies in its twofold character as (a) anti-colonial practice and (b) the epistemology of resistance (Medina, 2013). Translation as a decolonial tool works here in oppositions and in transference, even though the task of the translator is attentive to the transformation of the political and the supplement of meaning. Deriving from a 'hearing-to-respond', decolonial translation confronts the cruelty of existence, here produced by the coloniality of migration.

Notes

1 This framework engages with Anibal Quijano's (2000, 2008) analysis of the coloniality of power, María Lugones's (2007) critique of the coloniality of gender, and Cedric Robinson's (1983) examination of racial capitalism.
2 See http://thecaravan.org/taxonomy/term/1.
3 See www.thevoiceforum.org.
4 See www.women-in-exile.net/en/.
5 See https://iwspace.de.

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9

FAHMIDA RIAZ'S *ĀWĀZ*

Translation and Solidarities in the Global South

Haider Shahbaz

The progressive, feminist, and Third Worldist Urdu writer Fahmida Riaz started the cultural and political magazine *Āwāz* (Voice) in the late 1970s in Karachi, Pakistan. The magazine dissented against the military dictatorship of President Zia-ul-Haq while also promoting Third World solidarity by publishing works about anti-imperialist movements around the world as well as translations of various literary writers from Africa and Asia.

Fahmida Riaz was born in Meerut, Uttar Pradesh, in 1946 and grew up in Hyderabad, Sindh. Her first marriage took her to London, and after it ended in divorce, she returned to Karachi. There she published her brilliant poetry collection, *Badan Darida* (The Body Torn), which introduced modernist and feminist themes of eroticism, desire, and sexuality into the Urdu lyric. A few years later, she started *Āwāz*. The magazine's strong criticism of Zia-ul-Haq made both Riaz and the magazine a target for surveillance and censorship. Multiple cases of sedition, which could result in the death penalty, were registered against her. Her husband, the political worker Zafar Ali Ujan, was jailed. By the early 1980s, the magazine had been banned, and Riaz was forced into exile in India. She returned to Pakistan in 1988, after Zia-ul-Haq's death, and started a women's publishing house. Over the coming decades, she wrote multiple poetry collections, three novels, a novella, and many translations. She died in 2018 at the age of seventy-two.

Fahmida Riaz's important contributions as a writer have been studied by scholars in some pioneering essays and books (Alvi, 2018; Anantharam, 2009; Chaudhry, 2015; Kazmi, 2018; Khan, 2021; Naeem, 2018; Sindhu, 2013; Yaqin, 2022). However, I am interested in her role as the editor of *Āwāz*, which has received considerably less attention. *Āwāz* is a central node in the twentieth-century historical network of progressive Afro-Asian

DOI: 10.4324/9781003351986-10

magazines. Combining journalism and literary work, the magazine published essays, stories, reports, humorous columns, poems, plays, and interviews that highlighted opposition to nationalism, imperialism, capitalism, and patriarchy both within Pakistan and across what Riaz called the Third World, especially Africa and Asia.

In the first section of this chapter, I will show how the magazine opposed Zia-ul-Haq's military regime, which was supported and funded by cold war allies like the US and Saudi Arabia. I will pay close attention to Zia-ul-Haq's cultural policies regarding Urdu language and literature and the ways in which *Āwāz* resisted them by linking Urdu to wider Third World literary and political movements against imperialism, capitalism, and patriarchy. In the chapter's second section, I will elaborate a historically situated theory of translation based on the ideas and practices of African and Asian translators, editors, and writers interested in generating anti-imperialist solidarities during the long process of decolonisation in the twentieth century. As opposed to ideas about translation that emphasise errors, betrayals, and appropriations, I will show through a study of radical Third World magazines, particularly *Lotus* and *Āwāz*, how socialist and anti-imperialist writers used translation to create an Afro-Asian literary and political imagination during the cold war that emphasised connection and relation. These translators and writers reimagined the task of translation by focusing on the desires of newly decolonised people to speak with each other and learn from each other's literature and politics. In the process, they did not dismiss the difficulties of navigating textual, cultural, and historical differences. Instead, they took on the challenge of engaging with difference as they attempted to create new links between oppressed people and their struggles.

Translation as Resistance

Ishrat Afreen's words offer us a glimpse of the personal and political commitment required in the production of *Āwāz* during the military dictatorship of Zia-ul-Haq:

> I told them, I cannot leave Fahmida Riaz. No one is standing with her right now. They said, you are a girl. I said, I don't care, I can't leave her. I had no fear at all, that was the surprising part. I was not scared. They said, your translations, your work, it's all in the magazine. I said, yes, it is. There was a passion inside me.
>
> (Afreen, 2022, n.p.)

Afreen, who is now famous as a progressive and feminist Urdu poet, had joined the magazine as an assistant editor in the late 1970s, a few years after its inception, when she was still a student (Afreen, 2016, 2018). She

remembers getting off the bus on Tariq Road in Karachi and walking to Riaz's residence, which was serving as *Āwāz's* temporary office in those days. She remembers an atmosphere of fear. Indeed, many editors, contributors, and advertisers had already left *Āwāz* due to the military regime's oppressive tactics against the magazine. Afreen recalls Riaz telling her that she was facing a crisis. She also remembers the scenes from that time: a small room, next to Riaz's living room, that had been reserved for the magazine; a writing table, two chairs, and an old stool; Riaz's children playing in the room outside. She also remembers Falak Naz, who took care of Riaz's children and whose domestic and care work was essential to the production of the magazine. It was in this intimate, familial setting that three women – Riaz, Afreen, and Naz – produced one of the finest cultural and political magazines in Urdu despite intense pressure from the state machinery. Afreen went to work for Riaz twice a week until the day she showed up and found the doors locked shut. The police had raided the place, and Riaz had escaped to India. Following threats, court cases, and imprisonments, the military regime of Zia-ul-Haq had finally succeeded in shutting down the magazine.

General Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq came to power in Pakistan after staging a military coup, known by its code name Operation Fair Play, on 5 July 1977. He arrested the democratically elected leader, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, dissolved the national and provincial assemblies, suspended the Constitution, imposed martial law and appointed himself as the chief martial law administrator. He promised general elections within ninety days, but those elections never took place. Instead, he appointed himself President of Pakistan in 1978, and Bhutto was hanged at Central Jail Rawalpindi in 1979.

The coup marked the beginning of a period in which Zia-ul-Haq's political, economic, and cultural policies would, as Saadia Toor (2011) puts it, 'brutalize Pakistani society through a reign of terror' (127). The military dictator added constitutional amendments that gave extraordinary powers to the President, effectively ending democratic rule. He targeted socialist ideas and practices by denationalising industries, criminalising a range of labour actions, and banning student unions. He undermined secularism and promoted measures to Islamise Pakistan. In particular, he made changes to the penal code that introduced new criminal offences for adultery, punishments such as public flogging and stoning to death, and blasphemy laws. Through cultural policies and media campaigns, he emphasised national unity (rather than diversity), a strong and centralised state, masculine leadership, militarisation, religious piety, and a severely limited role for women in the public sphere. These plans were enforced through extreme censorship and arrests of radical politicians and artists.

Zia-ul-Haq's military dictatorship was bolstered by the global cold war. In 1979, two significant events in the region, the revolution in Iran and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, allowed Zia-ul-Haq to position himself as a

key ally of the US and Saudi Arabia. Military aid and religious charity poured into the country, strengthening Zia-ul-Haq's political and economic power both domestically and internationally (Jalal, 1990; Siddiqa, 2007). The global cold war not only changed the political economy of the country, but it had a significant impact on the formation of cultural expression, especially Urdu literature. Pakistan had already been, for decades before Zia-ul-Haq, a crucial site for the intersection of culture and cold war politics (Ali, 2015; Raza, 2019; Toor, 2011). In fact, the global cold war was always particularly attuned to the importance of literary expression (Davis, 2020; Bystrom et al., 2021; Popescu, 2020; Saunders, 1999). Towards this end, the CIA and the Congress for Cultural Freedom had collaborated with the Pakistani state to suppress progressive writers while funding other writers that supported religious nationalism and capitalist imperialism. This trend was extended and magnified by Zia-ul-Haq, who deepened the connections between Urdu and a masculinised, militarised, Islamised, and US-allied version of nationalism.

Zia-ul-Haq wanted to make a particular version of Urdu 'resound throughout the nation' (Ayres, 2009, 38) at the expense of Pakistan's regional languages, and so he directed that Urdu should be the medium of instruction in all schools. He also started 'Iqra Centres', which were institutions for the teaching of Urdu that were established in local mosques and religious schools (Ayres, 2009, 40). He encouraged the 'Arabization of Urdu', seen in the 'increasing use of Arabic words on Pakistan Television' (Toor, 2011, 149). In so doing, he advanced alliances with Saudi Arabia and, by association, the US, rather than focusing on Urdu's Indo-Persian roots. At official conferences, he exhorted Pakistani writers to promote his self-proclaimed patriotic values (Kamal, 2013). Selected verses from the national poet, Muhammad Iqbal, which aligned with an Islamised view of nationalism, were frequently circulated on official media channels (Toor, 2011, 150). Thus, Zia-ul-Haq's political, economic, and cultural schemes advanced religious hypernationalism, US and Saudi-backed cold war imperialism, rampant capitalism, and a militaristic and patriarchal view of culture, especially language and literature.

Riaz stood in clear and emphatic opposition to these ideas. In her own poems, essays, and editorials published in *Āwāz* and elsewhere, as well as in her editorial curation of *Āwāz* (especially in her selection and publication of Afro-Asian works translated into Urdu), she advanced a progressive, feminist, and Third Worldist vision of politics and culture. *Āwāz's* early issues from 1978 and 1979 were often joint publications produced in collaboration with banned socialist and anti-imperialist Urdu magazines, specifically *Meyār* and *al-Fatah* (Ahmad et al., 2023). These issues were primarily concerned with political journalism, providing important and urgent critiques of Zia-ul-Haq's military regime, American military aid, and right-wing religious parties. The issues also shared news about labour organisations in Pakistan, reports about Bhutto's hanging from newspapers and magazines published

across the Third World, political analysis about left-wing political parties, and 'catalogued the state's repressive tactics in breaking up protests and putting large numbers of dissidents in jail' (Waheed, 2022, 234). They carried poems by progressive writers such as Josh Malihabadi, Faiz Ahmad Faiz, and Fahmida Riaz herself – the poems were also generally concerned with commenting on current events. These earlier issues were produced by a large editorial team. The masthead lists reporters that represented all four provinces, the capital territory of Islamabad, the self-governing entity of Azad Kashmir, and fourteen different cities, as well as international correspondents stationed in Peking, Moscow, Canada, London, Europe, Dubai, and Kuwait.

Later issues of the magazine display a slightly different perspective. The magazine continued to publish some political journalism, but it also showed an expanded interest in cultural and literary issues. It included a larger number of original fiction and poetry works by Urdu writers as well as translations of Afro-Asian writers. (Note: I have used the older terms, 'Afro-Asian' and 'Third World', throughout the essay to reflect the language of the time, instead of the more current terms, 'Global South' or 'global majority'.) However, it would be a mistake to consider this a turn away from politics in general. All the cultural and literary material published in *Āwāz* in this period profoundly reflected social and political concerns. The magazine highlighted writers who often engaged with the genres of social realism or protest literature. These later issues also mention a smaller editorial team. Fahmida Riaz is still listed as the main editor, but only Ishrat Afreen is named as an assistant editor in all of these issues. Some of the other assistant editors who are occasionally named include Muhammad Nafees, Najam-ul-Hasan Ata, and Nafees Ahmad. Riaz's husband, Zafar Ali Ujan, who was listed as the managing editor in the earlier issues, is not part of the later issues.

It is possible that *Āwāz* pivoted due to the registering of sedition charges, which carried the death penalty, against Riaz. It was certainly easier to bypass the military dictatorship's growing censorship with literary work, especially translations of non-Pakistani writers, than with direct reporting on political events within Pakistan. In this way, translation constituted a key site of resistance in the cultural cold war playing out in authoritarian Third World countries, like Pakistan, which brutally curbed independent media outlets. Translation provided a way for editors and activists to continue the political education of people without threatening, at least for some time, their own lives and livelihoods. Indeed, the majority of these later issues of *Āwāz* are dedicated to translated literature from Afro-Asian writers who were committed to anti-imperialist struggles. They contain the work of famous writers from the Third World like Pablo Neruda, Nazim Hikmet, Rabindranath Tagore, and Mahmoud Darwish in addition to authors likely to have been less well known outside of their own languages such as the Bangladeshi writer Shawkat Osman, the Vietnamese writer Anh Duc, the Pakistani

writer Faiz Ahmed Faiz, the Palestinian writer Jabra Ibrahim Jabra, and the Iraqi writer Jafar Al-Khalili. There was also translated literature from Pakistan itself, usually oppositional works by marginalised writers writing in the Sindhi and Punjabi languages. The issues also included folktales, adapted for an Urdu audience, from places like China, Uzbekistan, and Kazakhstan. The later issues published reports and essays on anticolonial movements, such as one essay on the occasion of Zimbabwe gaining its independence and another about the similarities between Iran and Chile's revolutionary struggles. Translations from the Iranian newspaper, *Sobh-e-Azādegañ*, in the aftermath of the Iranian Revolution of 1979, appeared regularly in *Āwāz*. Certain worldly issues such as apartheid, racial discrimination, and the Palestinian struggle for liberation were regular features in the magazine during this time. While the publication focused on Afro-Asian writers, it also showcased Soviet writers like Maxim Gorky and Alexander Grin as well as certain radical Western European writers like Jean-Paul Sartre and Federico García Lorca.

Other than literary translations, the magazine additionally focused on music and film, especially from South Asia, and published essays on Runa Laila, Satyajit Ray, Dilip Kumar, and Meena Kumari. Regular features on Pakistani feminist writing were often found in *Āwāz*. For example, the magazine published reviews of the debut poetry collections of Shaista Habib and Fatima Hasan as well as original literary work by feminist writers like Zehra Nigah and Kishwar Naheed. Riaz's editorials, setting the tone for the magazine at the beginning of each issue, were emphatic statements in support of feminism and anti-imperialism.

Āwāz consistently gave importance to the very elements of Pakistani culture that Zia-ul-Haq was actively trying to suppress: ideas of socialism and secularism, links with other South Asian cultures and religions, anti-imperialist resistance against capitalist cold war powers, and the role of women and ethnic minorities. Most importantly, however, the translations of Afro-Asian writers published in the magazine showed that while Riaz was interested in resisting the national context of a military dictatorship, her resistance was also situated in a broader context of Third World solidarity. Just as Zia's domestic cultural policies cannot be properly understood without his cold war alliances, Riaz's entwinement of aesthetics and politics in the pages of *Āwāz* must be understood in its internationalist context. Through her editorial focus on translations of socialist, feminist, and Third Worldist writers, Riaz constructed a very different vision of Urdu literature, and, more broadly, Pakistani culture and politics. Opposed to the nationalist and imperialist vision enforced by Zia-ul-Haq, this was a capacious and resistant vision that emphasised solidarity with oppressed people. The vision was trained on people attempting to decolonise themselves, people who were emerging out of the colonialism of old European empires and struggling against the cold war imperialism of the US.

Through Afro-Asian translations, *Āwāz* effectively foregrounded practices of Third World solidarity. *Āwāz* was not alone in this task. During the period of the magazine's publication, South–South translations were common in the Third World. How do we think and write about these translations? I am interested in understanding how Pakistani women's literary and political work changes the very ways we think about translation and comparative literature. What theories will emerge from the progressive, feminist, and Third Worldist practices of translation that were engaged by Fahmida Riaz and other writers, editors, and translators across the Third World?

Translation as Solidarity

In her book *Against World Literature: On the Politics of Untranslatability* (2013), Emily Apter questions the assumption that 'translation is a good thing *en soi*' because it enables 'communication across languages, cultures, time periods and disciplines' (8). Apter is, implicitly or explicitly, building on a long line of theorists – from Nietzsche's (1974) criticism of Roman translations as a 'form of conquest' (137) to Antoine Berman's (2000) ethical appeal against translation's tendency towards 'negation' and 'acclimation' (285) of the foreign to, more recently, Barbara Cassin's *Vocabulaire Européen des Philosophies: Le Dictionnaire des Intraduisibles* (2004). These theorists have provided strong and urgent critiques of the excesses and pitfalls of translation. Apter's critique is particularly relevant in an American age of literary study that often flattens out and commodifies literary traditions from other parts of the world by translating them without fully paying attention to their linguistic and historical particularities. However, there is also a danger of elevating these situated theories to a universal methodology and obscuring other ways of thinking about translation that do, in fact, find something important in translation's ability to enable communication across languages.

I am particularly interested in the way Afro-Asian writers practised and theorised translation in what Aamir Mufti (2013, n.p.) has called the 'cultural complex of Bandung'. The term 'Bandung' in its strict historical meaning refers to the Indonesian city of Bandung, which hosted the first Afro-Asian Conference from 18–24 April 1955. However, the designation also more generally signals an expanded moment of anticolonial struggle and solidarity, especially, as scholars have underscored, in its cultural expression (Azeb, 2019; Halim, 2012; Halim, 2020; Lee, 2010; Prashad, 2007; Uddin, 2022). In this sense, Bandung is both 'interconnected' as well as 'diffuse and dispersed' and can refer to a host of 'attempts worldwide to reimagine the life of humanity from the perspective of peoples just emerging from the racialized denigration of colonial subjugation' (Mufti, 2016, 91). One of the most important cultural consequences of Bandung was the creation of the Afro-Asian

Writers Association (AAWA), which convened its first conference in Tashkent in 1958, and the publication of its trilingual magazine, *Lotus*, which first began publication in 1968 with the title *Afro-Asian Writings*.

Lotus, as Hala Halim (2012) argues, provided an unparalleled opportunity to establish 'non-Eurocentric modes and models of comparatism' (563). The question of translation is central to any attempt to think about literary comparison, and it was no different for *Lotus*. Halim (2012) puts it clearly: 'Of foremost importance to the Afro-Asian nexus as a case study of Global South comparatism is the question of language, and hence translation' (571). However, instead of privileging the textual deformations that often characterise studies of translation, the editors and contributors of the magazine attempted to formulate solidarity through an Afro-Asian model of translation. They focused on translation's capacity to inform Afro-Asians of each other's political and cultural conditions in the hopes of producing transformative solidarities between people that had been alienated from each other through centuries of racism, colonialism, and capitalism.

In the editorial to the fifth issue of *Afro-Asian Writings* (the original title of *Lotus* magazine), published in April 1970, the editor-in-chief, Youssef El-Sebai, centrally discussed both the crucial and creative role of translation in the production of 'the new buoyant spirit of Afro-Asia' (6):

> Unlike plastic arts which can travel freely – as it were – from one country to another, the written word requires quite a different process. And the role of translation in this process can scarcely be overstressed. The free exchange of literature depends, almost solely, on translation, which makes translation as creative as original writings.
>
> (7)

Thus, the issue, which contained poems and stories from Palestine, Ghana, Yemen, Sierra Leone, the Soviet Union, Philippines, Mali, Japan, Indonesia, and many other Afro-Asian countries, required the creative work of translation to spread these stories far and wide. Although El-Sebai believed that 'any of these works can be transplanted from one country to another, and yet, like a bush of wild roses, will still flourish' (7), the writing could not flourish or be read at all in the three languages of *Lotus* without the work of translation.

The fundamental importance granted to translation by *Lotus* did not mean that the work of translation was taken for granted. Both the significance and difficulty of the process of translation was repeatedly debated in the magazine's pages. For example, the same issue from April 1970 also contained a study by the Sudanese writer Mohei-Eddin Saber, entitled 'The Role of Translation for Rapprochement between the Afro-Asian Peoples'. Pointing towards the 'common human causes touching every individual', Saber emphasised 'understanding and cooperation' (13). He recommended the

establishment of translation bureaus as one of the key practical solutions to the question of cooperation between Afro-Asian peoples: 'Establishing permanent bureaus within an intercontinental framework and within national organisations which will translate and propagate the intellectual heritage of Africa and Asia' (15).

Similarly, in the April 1975 issue of *Lotus*, the Tanzanian writer J. P. Mbonde discussed the role of translation in his study, 'The Importance of Translation in the Development and Consolidation of Relations Between Writers and Peoples'. Mbonde was less convinced of the efficacy of translation in increasing cooperation than Saber. He warned of the danger that any translator might 'exaggerate or dilute the meaning' (24) of the original work, or that the translation might result in 'oversimplification or undersimplifcation' (27). He went as far as to say that the translator can become a 'traitor' (25). However, he conceded that 'the fundamental idea of translation for promoting relation between writers and peoples is a welcome approach although admittedly it is the best of all the worst ways (methods) given so far' (28). According to Mbonde, although it would be better if Afro-Asian writers and peoples could find a way to speak with each other while avoiding some of the inherent dangers in the process of translation, they 'cannot afford to wait for such instrument when our people are in a yawning vacuum should the contents of what is to be translated be relevant and of immediate need to our people' (24). In this way, Mbonde highlighted the importance of translation, despite some of the imperfections inherent in it, due its ability to create new cultural and political communities that were urgently needed to resist the ongoing colonial and neo-colonial dispossession of Afro-Asian people. As the translator and theorist Lawrence Venuti (2016, 203–204) notes:

> Political action requires communication and translation, even if what translation communicates can be only an interpretation, one among other possible and competing interpretations. Translation is still a means of establishing a common ground, even if riddled with linguistic, cultural, and social differences.

Thus, these writers discuss translation as a necessary tool for social, political, and cultural movements that attempt to connect people even as they acknowledge the limitations of translation.

A brief report, 'The Translation Into Mongolian of Afro-Asian Writers', was also published in the same issue of *Lotus* as Mbonde's study. Written in a more celebratory tone than the critical work by Mbonde, the report boasts that 'the Mongolian reader has at his disposal nearly 500 works by 100 Afro-Asian writers' (155). It goes on to list some of the Afro-Asian writers

that have been translated into Mongolian and is emphatic about the uses of translation for a radical Afro-Asian community:

> During the early years of the People's Revolution, the translation of world classics into Mongolian made it possible to spread and teach among the people the idea of solidarity with the workers of all countries, to instruct them in internationalism, and to familiarise them with the life of peoples all over the world.
>
> (154)

The emphasis on the political uses of translation in the creation of new, radical identities and relations sets apart the unique vision of translation as showcased in the pages of *Lotus*.

The feminist Urdu writer and translator Kishwar Naheed, whose work was featured in the pages of *Āwāz*, is one of the most important figures in this tradition of Afro-Asian translation. She is the author of several poetry collections, essays, columns, and memoirs. From writing in support of anti-imperialist and anti-apartheid movements in places like Palestine, Cuba, Vietnam, and South Africa to protesting George Floyd's murder, Naheed has always placed Afro-Asian solidarity at the centre of her work. Her translations include works by Leila Khaled, Nawal El Saadawi, June Jordan, Muin Bseiso, Alice Walker, Toni Morrison, Naguib Mahfouz, John Matshikiza, Maya Angelou, and many others. She participated in the 1973 Afro-Asian Writers Conference, held in Almaty.

In the preface to her translation of Leila Khaled's autobiography, Naheed advances the Afro-Asian idea of translation as the creation of solidarity across Third World political struggles. She writes: 'The Palestinian struggle is ongoing. I am also eager to participate in this struggle. This translation is a way to honour this desire' (Khaled, 1990, 10). She reiterated this sentiment about her translations of Afro-Asian writers during an interview I conducted with her in Islamabad on 14 September 2022. In Naheed's theorising about her translation work, as in the pages of *Lotus* and *Āwāz*, we find a vision of translation as an ethico-political project of solidarity and reciprocity. Naheed orients us towards a different idea of translation than the model of two distinct (cultural, national, racial, linguistic) communities that underlines the difference that must be crossed. This principle of difference is at times privileged to such an extent that all that is left is the incommensurability, the collision, the conquest – instead, she underlines the political struggles that link the original and translation, writer and translator. Here, translation is the possibility of a different relation. It is not a bridge between two grounds but the understanding that we share the same ground and that, precisely because of this shared ground, we must learn to speak to each other despite and through our linguistic differences.

In one of her editorials for *Āwāz*, which was written in the context of the Iranian struggle against American imperialism, Fahmida Riaz (n.d.) writes:

> How barren would literature be if it could not reflect the historical events and incidents happening all around it . . . if it could not write breathless stories drenched in the sweat of millions of people who are turning the direction of history with the power of their own hands?
>
> (9)

Āwāz focused on these struggles that were happening, as Riaz put it, *all around it* – writing and translating work about the Palestinian struggle, the struggle against apartheid in South Africa, anticolonial struggle in Zimbabwe, the Vietnam war, and much else. Instead of the boundaries of culture, nation, and language that distance one anti-imperialist struggle from another, Riaz dwells on the condition of *all-aroundness*. In this way, she highlights the connections rather than the borders between such struggles, and, furthermore, she places *Āwāz* and Urdu literature at the centre of these struggles. She focuses on the millions of oppressed people whose revolutionary work unites them and transforms them as they turn the direction of history towards new relations and new political communities – what Afro-Asian writers and translators referred to as the Third World.

Thus, by focusing on *Āwāz* and other Third World projects like *Lotus*, we can reimagine the very task of translation. The theories and practices of translation as they were engaged by Afro-Asian writers and thinkers aimed for transformative solidarity across connected, but not identical, struggles. They did not dismiss the problems of negotiating cultural, linguistic, and political differences, but they also did not elevate such differences to the status of a universal and transhistorical difference. Instead, they emphasised the possibility of translation as a connection between Afro-Asian people, underscoring their shared histories of colonialism and capitalism as well as their ongoing struggles against postcolonial nationalisms and cold war imperialisms.

At the same time, while there are similarities in the ways *Lotus* and *Āwāz* approach translation, there are also significant differences in the historical circumstances of their production that are worth noting. *Lotus* was a widely influential and far-reaching magazine that was defined by state funding, transnational editorial teams, trilingual editions, and multinational conferences. *Āwāz*, on the other hand, was a much smaller magazine, limited in its language, audience, and distribution. Far from receiving state funding, it operated against a hostile military dictatorship. However, its limitations are instructive. It allows us to consider bottom-up approaches to solidarity, showing how small magazines operated in different parts of the Third World, even under intense censorship, and managed to 'not only internationalize the local, but also to localize the international' (Stolte, 2022, 152). Moreover,

while the editorial teams of *Lotus* were dominated by men, *Āwāz*, at least in its later iterations, was edited most prominently by two women, Fahmida Riaz and Ishrat Afreen. Thus, *Āwāz* allows us a different angle of vision on the study of translation and Third World solidarity, even as it furthers the work and imagination of bigger magazines like *Lotus*.

The Afro-Asian model of translation that centres communication and solidarity reminds me of an anecdote from Edward Said's essay, 'Reflections on Exile' (2003). This is one of Said's most personal essays, and towards its beginning, Said recounts meeting Faiz Ahmed Faiz, the Pakistani poet, and Eqbal Ahmed, the Pakistani political theorist, in Beirut, Lebanon. This is a memorable scene: three exiles meeting in 'a dingy Beirut restaurant late one night' (175). Faiz recites his poems, and both Faiz and Ahmed translate the poems for Said. But, Said says, as it got later and later into the night, '[Faiz] and Eqbal stopped translating his verses for my benefit, but as the night wore on it did not matter. What I watched required no translation: it was an enactment of a homecoming expressed through defiance and loss' (175). Every time I read this chapter I am struck by this moment of 'no translation'. Of course, Said does not mean to say that he suddenly acquired fluency in Urdu. What he means to say is that he, an exiled writer himself, understands only too well the conditions that have driven Faiz out of his home, driven him to recite and translate poetry in Beirut. He understands the historical and political moment that gives birth to the poetry, its translation, and its eventual overcoming of linguistic differences in a moment of solidarity that requires no translation. Translation, in Said's anecdote, is not only about the semiotic transfer between languages, the purely textual play of words, but it is also rooted in the historical realities of the Third World such as exile, imperialism, and shared resistance.

At the time of the meeting mentioned in Said's essay, Faiz was living in Beirut and editing *Lotus*. He had left Pakistan as soon as martial law was imposed, correctly fearing that the military ruler was about to unleash a brutal regime of censorship, arrests, and executions. Furthermore, the meeting must have happened around the same time that Faiz's Urdu poem, 'For Palestinian Martyrs', was published by Fahmida Riaz in *Āwāz*. His poem, written in the voice of a Palestinian exile, is a testament to anti-imperialist resistance. The opening couplet reads:

جس زمیں پر بھی کھلا میرے لہو کا پرچم
لہلہاتا ہے وہاں ارضِ فلسطین کا علم
Jis zamīñ par bhī khula mīrai lahū ka parcham
Lehlehata hai vahañ arz-e-Falastīn ka alam
Wherever my banner of blood unfurled
Flies there the flag of Palestine.

Āwāz paired Faiz's poem with an Urdu translation of the Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish's poem, 'An al-Umniyat' (Concerning Wishes; translated into Urdu as *Sehar Ka Wā'da* [The Promise of Dawn]). The poem situates Palestinian resistance within, as Zeina Maasri (2020) writes, 'a historical map of anticolonial and anti-imperial insurrections – citing Algeria, Yemen, Havana, Aswan and Congo – yet stresses its autonomous moment' (189). Darwish, of course, himself lived in exile for nearly two decades, many of those years, like Faiz, in Beirut. Exile serves as a central analytic in the representation of the Palestinian struggle in his and in many other people's works. Interestingly, soon after the publication of this issue of *Āwāz*, *Āwāz* was banned and Riaz herself would be forced out of the country by multiple threats and court cases. She found refuge in India with the help of the Punjabi feminist writer Amrita Pritam, only to return after Zia's death.

The personal exiles of writers like Darwish, Faiz, and Riaz – all connected, in one way or another, to *Āwāz* – can be read in parallel to the exilic orientation, as conceived by *Āwāz*, of Urdu itself. The magazine, through its multiple and intersecting plays of exiles, seems to be pushing Urdu literature out of its association with a nationalist imaginary, out of its designation as a unique cultural repository of an exclusionary and hegemonic national identity, into a transnational and translational space of affiliations, of reciprocity and solidarity, the space of the Third World. Exile, in this sense, teaches us that even as people and texts are uprooted from their naturalised communities – whether through political violence, in the case of people, or the violence of translation, in the case of texts – they create new communities and new relations. It is the work of a truly worldly comparative study to pay attention to these new communities and relations that are made possible by Afro-Asian exilic and translational solidarities in the Third World.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Ishrat Afreen, who generously shared issues of *Āwāz* and other publications with me from her personal collection. Her personal collection and the opportunity to interview her made this article possible. I would also like to thank the South Asian Research & Resource Center (especially the archivists, Ahmad Salim and Dr. Humaira Ishfaq), Veerta Ali Ujan, and UCLA Library for giving me access to archives. I am grateful to UCLA's Department of Comparative Literature for funding my degree and broader research. Versions of this article were presented at the 2022 Institute of World Literature, the 2022 Tasavvur Collective Symposium on Writing Muslim Women in South Asia, and the 2023 annual meeting of the American Comparative Literature Association. I thank all the organisers, participants, and audience members. For their advice and encouragement at various stages, I would like to thank Aamir Mufti, Peter James Hudson, Pooma Swami,

Lawrence Venuti, Efrain Kristal, Núria Codina Solà, and Ibrahim Badshah. I also wish to thank Claire Chambers and Ipek Demir for including this article in the present volume. All translations from the Urdu are mine unless otherwise specified.

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10

TRANSLATING THE OTHER

Ghassan Kanafani's Travelogue . . . *Then Rose Asia*

Peiyu Yang

'Across the shield of wind', Palestinian writer Ghassan Kanafani writes in his 1965 travelogue, . . . *Then Rose Asia* (. . . ثم أشرقت آسيا), 'we will enter the richest, largest, most curious world. The most ancient world, where the sound of human footsteps spread out from the furthest point in history that people can remember' (2015/1965, 225). This 'ancient' and 'curious' world is China, which Kanafani visited twice (in 1965 and 1966) and which inspired much of his creative writing and political thought. Kanafani (1936–1972) – a novelist, playwright, and journalist – is perhaps the most important literary figure of the Palestinian resistance. He was a spokesperson for the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine until his assassination by Mossad in 1972. In 1965 he was invited to China to attend the ceremony celebrating the sixteenth anniversary of the establishment of the People's Republic of China. He also visited India during this trip and published an account of his travels to both emerging powers upon his return to Palestine. This book has largely been ignored by scholars of Kanafani's work despite the revealing and insightful connections he drew between anti-colonial struggles in both China and India and the Palestinian cause.

Kanafani's . . . *Then Rose Asia* provides an important case study into how Kanafani envisioned an Arab–China solidarity, as well as how he romanticised communist China and its leader, Mao Zedong. The work occupies an important place in the timeline of Arab–Chinese (and especially Palestinian–Chinese) solidarity building. Its documenting of some of the significant early efforts towards this end makes it important to conversations about the turmoil of colonial transitions where communist selves and communist others worked as allies. The work's title, with its ellipsis implying suddenness, speaks to the sense of hopefulness that characterised the 1960s. This was a decade in

DOI: 10.4324/9781003351986-11

which pan-Arabism flourished, yet it was simultaneously a period in which Palestinians came to realise that they could not depend on other parts of the Arab world for meaningful financial and military support in their conflict with the state of Israel . . . *Then Rose Asia* is at once a text by an Arab communist and a Palestinian anti-colonial agitator. In this chapter, I will use the text to explore Palestinian–Chinese solidarity, as well as treating it as an example of the broader Arab–Chinese solidarity-making that was developing in this period (Yang, 2019).[1]

My chapter provides a close reading of the Chinese section of . . . *Then Rose Asia*. I approach the travelogue as a case study of cultural translation: more specifically, an Arab communist's attempt to translate the Chinese experience of communism into the Palestinian context. This text is not a linguistic translation but rather a translation of Kanafani's observations during his time in China into terms accessible to Palestinian readers, a translatability that aims to bridge the differences of geography and identity between two 'others'. It is a translation in the cultural sense: a working out and imagining of the possibility of applying aspects of the Chinese communist model to the Palestinian context. As such, this chapter shows how . . . *Then Rose Asia* serves as both a documentary of Palestinian struggle and an invitation to embrace China as a future world power. It argues that Kanafani reveals his own physiological and political frustrations, hopes, and insights through commenting on the communist other. In my close reading of the text, I pay particular attention to the connections Kanafani makes between the Arab world and China as part of his probing into how Chinese successes and lessons – especially those relating to land reform and land management – could help to revitalise the morale and restore the dignity of the Palestinian people. At the same time, as I outline in the final section on the male gaze, Kanafani's efforts to both learn from and build solidarity with Chinese communists cannot be disentangled from his own cultural biases and perspectives within a larger framework of colonised otherness.

Kanafani looked to China for lessons and inspiration because he recognised that, though neither China nor Palestine in the 1960s was a colony, both nations were part of the Global South and saw themselves as suppressed by the world's colonial regimes. Palestine had been under British mandate rule from 1917 to 1947. In 1948, with the triumph of Zionism, the majority of Palestinian territory was folded into the state of Israel. China, by contrast, gained rather than lost sovereignty around this period. The pivotal developments in China in the mid-twentieth century were its victory in the second Sino-Japanese war in 1945 and later the Chinese communist party's defeat of the Kuomingtang in the Chinese civil war (1945–1949), leading to the establishment of the People's Republic of China. Kanafani's writing on China, particularly his insights into China's anti-colonial resistance that can be likened to a form of decolonisation, represents a South–South conversation that emphasises 'horizontal' interaction (Lionnet and Shih, 2005, 11).

Though this article will look at horizontal interactions between China and the Arab world, it is important to note that this South–South conversation did not entirely reject or ignore the Global North. As we know from the field of global cold war studies, the Sino-Arab relationship was cultivated in a broader geopolitical context of which both sides were keenly aware. Nonetheless, only a few studies have touched on Sino-Arab literary exchanges, which is my direct focus (Popescu, 2012, 37). This chapter will add to our knowledge of the Sino-Soviet split (in the 1950s and 1960s) by exploring how Arab intellectuals such as Ghassan Kanafani positioned themselves during this major geopolitical realignment so as to enhance Chinese support for decolonisation efforts in the Arab world.

Treating . . . *Then Rose Asia* as a case study in cultural translation, Kanafani's exploration of Chinese society and anti-colonial resistance complicates our understanding of how power functions in the process of cultural translation. In his article 'The Concept of Cultural Translation in British Social Anthropology', Talal Asad examines the imbalance of power between a translator from a strong culture and a weaker culture that is being translated, such as when an anthropologist from an authoritative culture writes about and 'translates' cultures that are less powerful (Asad, 2010/1986, 8). Asad's discussion of these power imbalances provides an analytical tool to help unpack Kanafani's cultural translation of China. Yet, while Asad emphasises the inequality between cultures in the postcolonial context, in Kanafani's translation the power dynamic is more complicated. Since China and Arab countries both belonged to the Global South, it is hard to define which was more powerful in the 1960s. This chapter will explore how power shapes such cultural translation processes and whether Kanafani was able to escape Orientalist understandings of the East that distort knowledge of China.

Ghassan Kanafani and His World

Ghassan Kanafani (1936–1972), author, political spokesman, and journal editor, is remembered by the Lebanese intellectual Elias Khoury as 'a militant, political writer, and essayist, literary innovator and preeminent Palestinian novelist' (Khoury, 2013, 85). Born in the city of Acre in 1936 in British Mandate Palestinian, Kanafani received his early education at a French Catholic school in Jaffa. He belongs to the Nakba generation, as one of 700,000 Palestinians displaced from their homeland when the state of Israel was created in 1948.[2] Kanafani had to leave Jaffa, his hometown, and flee to Lebanon as a refugee. His family later moved to Syria and settled in Damascus where he completed his high school diploma and bachelor of arts degree ('Biography: Ghassan Kanafani', n.d., n.p.). He later moved to Beirut to work as a journalist and eventually became editor of the weekly journal *al-Hadaf*, the mouthpiece of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine. Kanafani's

personal experience of forced expulsion during the Nakba, and his later witnessing of the travails of children in refugee camps, inspired him to use his pen to call attention to the suffering of his fellow Palestinians. During his relatively short lifetime, he published eighteen books, including canonical novellas such as *Men in the Sun*, *All That Is Left to You*, and *Returning to Haifa*, many of which were translated into various languages. Kanafani was assassinated along with his niece by Mossad in a car explosion in 1972.

Given Kanafani's personal experience of the Nakba, it is unsurprising that the Palestinian–Arab struggle was a central focus of his literary and political career. Notably, he developed the notion of resistance literature, which took up the 'weapon of literature' to aid in the Palestinian struggle against exile and cumulative land loss and functioned as a response to Zionist propaganda (Kanafani, 2015, 11). Kanafani's concept of resistance literature was further adopted and theorised by Barbara Harlow in her seminal work *Resistance Literature*. Harlow defines resistance literature as the literature that resists colonialism, averring that 'the theory of resistance literature is in its politics' (Harlow, 1987, 30). As a communist, Kanafani's ideology was also significantly influenced by Marxism, Leninism, and Maoism. Indeed, the hope of meeting Mao Zedong was a key impetus for Kanafani's two visits to China in the 1960s, which inspired his writing of . . . *Then Rose Asia*.

As one of the most influential Palestinian writers and intellectuals of his generation, Kanafani's literary works have been widely studied in both the Arab world and the West.[3] Some studies have explored how Kanafani introduces and applies the notion of resistance literature in his short stories, particularly *Men in the Sun* (Harlow, 1987; Holt, 2021; Khoury, 2013). For my purposes in this chapter, two themes in studies of Kanafani's literature are particularly relevant: his political ideology and his symbolic use of the female body. While both these themes provide insight into Kanafani's modes of thinking about China, Palestine, and the world, they also illustrate his approach to cultural translation. In each case, he explains China to a Palestinian readership in ways that reflect his biases, aspirations, and political commitments. In other words, he uses cultural translation to advance his causes. In terms of his political ideology, Nancy Coffin explores how Kanafani was influenced by Maoism's emphasis on the role of writers in spreading revolutionary ideologies and how this influence was reflected in his novellas *Umm Said* and *All That Is Left to You* (Coffin, 1996). Elizabeth Holt further discusses how Kanafani's concept of resistance literature was heavily impacted by Mao's ideology (Holt, 2021, 3). Building on these studies, my chapter analyses Kanafani's observations of communist China and his evaluation of the possibility of applying the Chinese communist model to the Palestinian context.

The symbolic treatment of the female body in Kanafani's novellas is likewise illustrative of the themes of translation and decolonisation in that the

female body becomes a site of resistance to Zionist propaganda. Scholars such as Nancy Coffin (1996), Amy Zalman (2002), and Abir Hamdar (2014) have approached the topic from various perspectives. For instance, Coffin positions Umm Said, a female peasant character who preaches revolutionary ideas among her fellow peasants, as an example through which to explore how Kanafani creates female characters as symbols of revolutionary ideas. Coffin suggests that Umm Said's identity as a peasant might be influenced by Maoism's idealisation of peasants' role in revolutions. Whereas Coffin focuses on powerful female characters, Abir Hamdar pays attention to the image of the disabled female body by analysing Shafiqa, a marginalised and silenced female character in Kanafani's most celebrated novella, *Men in the Sun* (Hamdar, 2014, 39). According to Hamdar, Shafiqa's disabled body is a metaphor for Palestine as an injured nation – a people injured and rendered immobile by the Zionists' occupation. Offering another perspective, Amy Zalman explores the diverse representations of femininity throughout Kanafani's works, suggesting that the female characters of Kanafani's narratives stay in the occupied Palestinian land in order to wait for the return of male characters (Zalman, 2002, 17). Building on insights from these scholars, this chapter complicates the meaning of the female body and femininity in Kanafani's work by shifting Kanafani's male gaze from Palestinian women onto their Chinese counterparts.

Kanafani visited China in 1965 and 1966, trips that came to heavily influence his political ideology. After returning from his first trip, he published accounts of his travels in the weekly journal *al-Muharrir*, for which he was working at the time, as well as a 150-page travelogue which is included in the anthology of his works (Kanafani, 2015/1965). The section of the travelogue on China offers his Arab readership a detailed introduction to Chinese society of the 1960s, including the country's tourist attractions, history, and especially the Chinese model of communism. He recounts, among other things, his trips to major cities, conversations with high-ranking officials and ordinary Chinese people, how factories and agricultural production are managed in China, the Muslim community of the northwest, and even the monthly income and economic and living circumstances of peasants and workers. In terms of style, Kanafani did not write in the classical rhymed prose of the Arab *rihla* genre but in fluid unrhythmical prose. His artistic writing style and anecdotes on deconstructing cultural stereotypes – for example, concerning the use of chopsticks – make the travelogue a pleasure to read.[4]

Kanafani's text is a rich historical source in a number of contexts. Perhaps most saliently, through the eyes of an Arab communist, it shows how the People's Republic of China strove to establish solidarity with African and Asian countries. Kanafani also discusses China's attempts to build diplomatic support during a period in which the country was falling out with

its communist counterpart, the Soviet Union. For example, in documenting his meeting with the famed military commander and then foreign minister of China, Chen Yi (1901–1972), Kanafani writes in detail about how this establishment figure explained to him China's foreign policy and the reasons for China's split with the Soviet Union. He also explores why China supported the Palestinian cause, namely because Chen Yi saw this is a way to build support for China in the Arab world. Accordingly, Kanafani's trip was seen by both Arab powers and the Chinese government as mutually beneficial: an opportunity to build bridges and deepen ties between them. Kanafani's meeting with Chen Yi was a unique example of non-Western countries working during the 1960s to establish bilateral relationships and foster solidarity in the face of Western geopolitical power. Indeed, Chinese and Palestinian mutual effort to build solidarity provides an important example through which to explore the horizontal relationships and solidarities between nationals of the Global South (Lionnet and Shih, 2005, 11; Yang, forthcoming).

Reflecting this optimism, Kanafani was warmly welcomed by Chinese officials during his trips and was assigned an English-speaking guide. He was taken to major cities that showcased the achievements of communist China in industry, agriculture, culture, and education. A photo of Kanafani sitting on the Great Wall with a smile on his face suggests that he enjoyed the tours and hospitality received during his visits.

Kanafani's warm welcome is best understood in the context of China's effort to deepen Afro-Asian solidarity, which it undertook throughout the cold war as an active member of the non-aligned movement. The non-aligned movement was a group of 120 countries that refused to formally align with or against any major power (most notably the Soviet Union and the United States) in the context of the cold war. Since the founding of the new Republic of China in 1949, the Chinese government had made non-alignment a cornerstone of its geopolitical strategy, which led it to actively cultivate solidarity with African and Asian countries through diplomatic visits and providing financial, medical, and technological aid for these nations' anticolonial struggles. From 1963 to 1964, for example, Chinese president Zhou Enlai and Chen Yi visited thirteen Afro-Asian countries, including Syria, Sudan, Somalia, Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco, and Egypt. Such efforts to win support from the postcolonial world became particularly important after China diplomatically split with the Soviet Union in 1965, risking international diplomatic isolation.

. . . Then Rose Asia

To understand Kanafani's great enthusiasm towards communist China, it is best to examine his travelogue in the context of the Palestinian struggle,

particularly in the years between the Nakba (1948) and Naksa (1967). For a long time, Kanafani was a believer in President Gamal Abdel Nasser of Egypt and his efforts to unite neighbouring Arab countries to fight for the return of the Palestinian land. This hope collapsed in 1967 after the defeat of the Arab allies (Egypt, Syria, and Jordan) during the six-day war, after which Israel occupied the Golan Heights, West Bank, East Jerusalem, and parts of the Sinai Peninsula. This expansion of Israeli occupation led to the exodus of 280,000 to 325,000 Palestinians from the West Bank and Golan Heights. The day of Arab defeat, 5 June 1967, is remembered as the Naksa, meaning the day of the setback. After the Naksa, the Arab world began to realise the enormity of its lack of military power compared to Israel and its European allies. The Naksa and the waning of enthusiasm for the Palestinian cause in the war's aftermath confirmed what Kanafani was already coming to recognise years earlier: that the rhetoric of Arab solidarity with Palestine was unlikely to be matched by more tangible forms of support. For example, we can see Kanafani criticising Arab countries in the region, especially the Gulf countries, as early as 1963 when he portrayed them in his novella *Men in the Sun* (Kanafani, 1999) as turning a deaf ear to Palestinians' suffering.

Just as Kanafani was losing hope of gaining support from Arab countries, he was simultaneously exploring sources of hope in the East. This is reflected in the title of his travelogue, . . . ثم أشرقت آسيا, which is translated most precisely and most literally as . . . *Then Rose Asia*. The ellipsis in the title implies that China for a long time was not visible on the world stage due to having been overshadowed by global colonial powers. The word 'then' implies the country's slow but sure emergence on the global stage. The word 'rose' connotes the sun, which metaphorically signifies hope, dissipation of darkness, and a rebalancing of global power in the newly 'visible' Asia. Kanafani's title also reminds us of Napoleon Bonaparte's famous caution in the face of European efforts to expand around the globe: 'we had better hope the Orient stays asleep', Napoleon purportedly said, 'for when it awakens, it will shake the world' (qtd. in Wagner, 2011). Kanafani, who knew of Napoleon's alleged warning, has the following to say at the end of his travelogue:

> There is no doubt that Napoleon's consternation [that China would wake up], which troubled him more than a century ago, has now become a reality. 'Let China remain asleep,' said Bonaparte. Well, China has awoken, she has awoken from her long slumber thanks to the sweat and blood of her people, in the middle of the most difficult isolation.
>
> (Kanafani, 2015/1965, 301)

This assessment by Kanafani was meant specifically for his Arab audience. Indeed, his call to turn to the East can be understood as the beginning of the Arab world seeing China as an emerging global power. Continuing with the

metaphor of the sun, Kanafani depicts Asia, particularly China, as the light. With Europe withdrawing from the Arab world, Kanafani hopes that China will do what European colonial powers and America had hitherto neglected to do: help restore the dignity of the Palestinian people. For Kanafani, support from China would put Palestine in a better negotiating position globally. Indeed, . . . *Then Rose Asia* can be read as an invitation for Arab readers to consider, many of them for the first time, the possibilities of a Chinese alliance.[5]

Kanafani's hope that China would support the Palestinian cause, I argue, was not simply based on his personal affinity for China or even his belief in communism. Rather, I would like to suggest that Kanafani's expectation for Chinese support was based on his long-time observation of China and his analysis of the nation's diplomatic standing in the 1960s. That Kanafani keenly followed news reports about China published in both the Arabic and English media is evidenced by the frequent quoting in his travelogue of Western views of China. As an Arab intellectual, Kanafani had been particularly following China's diplomatic efforts in the Global South. For example, in his meeting with Chen Yi, Kanafani commented on China's diplomatic dilemma and noted that Chen Yi and Zhou Enlai's travels to the thirteen Afro-Asian states had failed to expand China's influence in that part of the world. In fact, some of China's traditional allies, such as Algeria, formally decided to stand with the Soviet Union during the Sino-Soviet split. Describing the Chinese diplomatic mission in Africa as a failure, Kanafani concluded that China had been compelled to seek to strengthen ties with Arab countries in order to avoid further isolation during a period of geopolitical vulnerability (Kanafani, 2015/1965, 270).

Kanafani's overtures towards securing Chinese support were warmly received by the Chinese foreign minister, Chen Yi. Chen Yi described Chinese backing for the Palestinian cause as a matter of principle. In contradistinction to Western countries that supported Israel or adopted an official position of neutrality, Chen Yi condemned Israel, referring to it as 'a country that was built by forcefully expelling the original inhabitants of the land' (Kanafani, 2015/1965, 271). According to Kanafani's account of their meeting, Chen Yi also remarked: 'How can we say that each side is fifty percent correct and fifty percent wrong? If we accept this logic, how we can maintain the stand for our [Chinese] revolution?' (2015/1965, 271). In responding to Kanafani's plea, Chen Yi not only confirmed China's full support for Palestine but also connected the Palestinian struggle to China's revolutionary ideology, even using the Israeli–Palestinian conflict to explain the Chinese–Soviet split. According to Chen Yi, the rift between China and the Soviet Union was as fundamental as that between Palestine and Israel. Here, it is interesting to see how China, while expressing its full support for the Palestinian cause,

strategically and rhetorically used it to explain its own diplomatic struggles and, subsequently, to ask for the solidarity of Arab nations in their turn.

Land and People's Communes

For Kanafani, China not only represented an emerging world power that could provide diplomatic advocacy for Palestine. It also offered a model of communism that could be applicable to Palestinian society, which, like Chinese society, was at once heavily reliant on agriculture and had areas of extremely high population density. Throughout . . . *Then Rose Asia*, Kanafani expresses a keen interest in the land, particularly as regards Chinese efforts to become agriculturally self-sufficient. This focus in part stems from Kanafani's own deep connection to Palestinian land, the loss of Palestinian land, and the common Palestinian experience of suffering hunger in refugee camps due to the loss of land.

As reflected in his travelogue, Kanafani's interest in Chinese land remains constant throughout his visits. For example, recalling his first day in China, he describes how Chinese farmers worked the fields in Guangdong Province. He goes on to provide a detailed overview of the lives of Chinese farmers, including their daily tasks, income, labour, benefits, education, sources of entertainment, and marriage patterns. This focus on the land is not unique to his travelogue, as Palestinian land has a symbolic meaning in much of Kanafani's writing. While Zionist rhetoric attempted to erase the existence of Palestinian land, Kanafani rebuts such rhetoric by emphasising its fertility. The main character in *All That's Left to You* lies on the ground to feel the softness of the land and observes that it is 'like a virgin trembling beneath him' (Kanafani, 1972, 169). Similarly, at the beginning of *Men in the Sun*, Abu Qais, one of the main characters, laid down on the ground, 'breathed the scent of the earth, imagined that he was sniffing his wife's hair' (Kanafani, 1999, 21). Here, the feminised Palestinian land symbolises the feminised Palestinian nation that is being dominated by the more powerful oppressor, Israel. Palestinians cannot be separated from their land, and the lost land waits for their return (Eid, 2019).

In contrast to writing portraying Palestinian land as fertile and feminised, Kanafani focuses primarily on the notion of self-reliance when discussing Chinese land and agriculture. He is impressed in particular with Chinese efforts to overcome deprivation and achieve self-reliance, especially after the withdraw of all Soviet financial and technical aid to China in 1960. As Kanafani writes, this was 'poverty, if we wanted to use the ugliest word [to describe] China during its long history . . . But China succeeded in putting it in check' (Kanafani, 2015/1965, 270). The writer's lauding of self-reliance seems intended to send a message to his Palestinian audience, especially in the context of Palestine's declining ability to rely on support from its Arab

neighbours. For Kanafani, China's ability to increase agricultural production despite facing isolation from the Soviet Union is inspirational. Meanwhile, Kanafani's emphasis on Chinese agricultural reforms also highlights a contrast he recognised between China as a sovereign country, able to control agricultural policy and cultivate its own land, and Palestine as an occupied nation, where much of its terrain is no longer controlled by its own people, let alone its own government.

In addition to praising Chinese self-sufficiency, Kanafani also introduced to his Palestinian readers to two key features of 1960s Chinese agricultural life: land reform and people's communes. The concept of land reform was not new to Kanafani when he visited China, since Egypt had already conducted similar reforms in the 1950s to redistribute land from landlords to peasants. The idea of people's communes, however, was more novel. People's communes were China's attempt to realise socialism in rural areas. Instead of dividing rural areas based on township, people's communes functioned as collectively owned units where peasants pooled their land and managed resources communally. In exchange, the state provided them with education, meals, and healthcare. As recounted in his travelogue, Kanafani visited the Shuang Qiao Commune, located in a suburb of Beijing, which in the 1960s was used to display the Chinese model of communism to foreigners. During his visit, Kanafani wrestled with whether it was essentially a forced labour camp, as much Western media described it, or the best possible solution to the problem of low-yield agriculture that plagued China during that decade and earlier (Kanafani, 2015/1965, 255). His overall assessment was mixed. On the one hand, Kanafani noticed that the agricultural devices employed in the commune were dated and therefore not particularly well suited to efficiently expand agricultural output. On the other hand, he also acknowledged what he viewed as the tremendous work ethic of Chinese peasants, noticing that even Chinese women worked in the fields just as the men did. He also wrote about other topics ranging from the introduction of duck farming in the commune to the social benefits, including free childcare and maternity leave, which were provided to members.

Kanafani was particularly curious about the shift from distributing land to peasants to pooling land and resources collectively. He therefore asked many questions about what peasants thought about individual versus communal land ownership. While conveying the answers given by Chinese officials, Kanafani also admitted that it was impossible to know the true feeling of Chinese peasants because of the language barrier and the official nature of his visit (he was always accompanied by a translator, leaving him with little chance to speak with commune members directly even if language were no barrier). On balance, Kanafani provides a positive account of the Chinese commune model, as he was impressed by the level of daily agricultural production. He wrote, for instance, that Chinese farmers, unlike 'what the

outside sources say, are healthy, and have a diet rich in fruit and other foods . . . The news that China is experiencing a semi-famine appears to be a rumour' (Kanafani, 2015/1965, 300). Kanafani's thinking about people's communes can be read as part of his attempt to work out the applicability of the Chinese communist model to the development of agriculture in Palestine.

Kanafani's Male Gaze

In addition to agriculture and land, Kanafani devotes significant space in . . . *Then Rose Asia* to depicting Chinese women and the gender dynamics of Chinese society. And, just as with agriculture and land, his interest in these topics reflects his Palestinian background and the context of his Palestinian audience. In reading Kanafani's writing on Chinese women, it is useful to examine how Kanafani engages in 'translating', or better yet, 'approximating the other', in light of Talal Asad's view of cultural translation (2010/1986, 18). Kanafani's special interest in Asia, and particularly China, as a rising global power that could potentially intervene in the Palestinian cause provides an opportunity for critical reflection on the rhetoric of persuasion and appropriation that characterises his travelogue. One can consider, for example, how Kanafani depicts Chinese women and dwells on their clothing as well as their roles in Chinese society. For instance, in the following passage, Kanafani informs his Arab readers of the sartorial exquisiteness of Chinese women in their military uniforms, attempting perhaps to shift predominant colonial modes of female aesthetics in the Arab world, which have for centuries prioritised Whiteness as a standard for female beauty. Commenting on female seductiveness and beauty, Kanafani writes:

> Only in Hong Kong, you come to discover that Chinese women are the most beautiful of all. Underneath their thick/silky black hair, their narrow eyes glow with exceptional feminine looks. You will be astounded by the simple elegance of the round collars surrounding their necks, and the tight dress split above the knees, donned with extremely suggestive shyness, as well the symmetrically slim figures of the policewomen in their khaki uniforms.
>
> (Kanafani, 2015/1965, 304)

As is evident in this passage, among others, Kanafani cloaks himself in the borrowed authority of an Orientalist male gaze; by choosing to perceive and highlight the suggestive sexuality of women, Kanafani tailors his writing to a male readership. Consciously or not, this desire-induced objectification of Chinese women creates a tension in the text for female readers, in particular for Chinese women. When Kanafani speaks of the lurking appeal in their eyes or the body-conscious cuts of their dresses, he not only gives voice to

a repressed male desire, but also subjects Chinese women to the male gaze. In doing so, he fails to consider what this act of 'cultural translation' might say about the place (status, aesthetic) of women in a largely male-dominated and unequal society. Kanafani thus falls into the trap of what Asad describes as 'the dilemmas of "relativism"', which 'appear differently depending on whether we think of abstracted understanding or of historically situated practices' (2010/1986, 15). In Kanafani's narrative, the interplay between East and West, gender and power, invites us to question the boundaries of cross-cultural communication.

Indeed, Asad reminds us, building on the insights of Walter Benjamin, a successful translation 'is premised on the fact it is addressed within a specific language, and therefore also to a specific practice, a specific form of life. The further that form of life is from the original, the less mechanical is the reproduction' (2010/1986, 21). Cultural translation is itself 'a matter of determining implicit meaning', an act in which reading and translating other cultures is always susceptible to the notion of the 'implicit' and the 'unconscious' (Asad, 2010/1986, 16). It is easy to see how Kanafani's 'translation' of China at a critical moment of decolonisation in the Arab world, and competition among global powers throughout the world, is itself imbricated in the condition of the same powers (national, international, gendered) it tries to negotiate.

In addition to the aesthetics of Chinese women, Kanafani is impressed with the fact that in China almost all the women he saw worked outside the home. He notices that Chinese women put great effort into their work, which they perform alongside men. Kanafani is not wrong to highlight the impact of this labour: scholars have convincingly demonstrated that the Chinese female labour force contributed significantly to the country's agricultural and economic growth between 1980 and 1990 (Lee, 1995, 378). By contrast, although the Arab world had for decades witnessed heated debate about the place of women in society, in most Arab countries during the 1960s the rate of women's participation in the workforce remained very low. For example, in 1960s Egypt, women accounted for just four to six percent of agricultural labourers and about two to three percent of the industrial labour force (Tucker, 1976, 5). It is possible that the contrast between Chinese and Arab female workforce participation led Kanafani to imagine the possibility of more Palestinian women in the labour force and perhaps even in Palestinian military resistance to Israeli occupation. But it is hard to know for certain whether this was the case. It is notable, however, that in his novella *Ummu Saad*, published four years after his trip to China, Kanafani gives significant agency to female characters, including a peasant woman – a lead character – who preaches revolutionary ideology to her fellow villagers.

While finding himself impressed with the work ethic of Chinese women, Kanafani at the same time was left uncomfortable by it, concluding that

through work, 'Chinese women lost their femininity, if our Arab standard is correct' (2015/1965, 244). Kanafani makes this comment based on two principal factors. The first is that Chinese women work outside in the fields, which makes them appear more muscular, and by extension more masculine, than women in Arab countries (2015/1965, 244). Second, Chinese women in the 1960s rarely wore makeup, and most wore trousers: 'Among thousands of women that I saw in Beijing, Shanghai and Hang Zhou, I can count fewer than ten women wearing dresses, I cannot count any women who put any form of makeup, except blue pants. Blue pants is what I saw in streets of Chinese cities' (Kanafani, 2015/1965, 282). Kanafani even makes the false claim that Chinese women historically did not wear makeup in order to conform to the Chinese male ideal of natural beauty.

This kind of male gaze, reflected through Kanafani's detailed description of women's clothing and the female body, is not new in Arabic literature. Rifa'a al-Ṭahṭāwī, the famous Egyptian intellectual, writer, and educator, also provides a detailed description of Parisian women in the early nineteenth century, commenting that their clothing, although pretty, showed too much skin and lacked modesty (Ṭahṭāwī and Newman, 2004, 226). Kanafani projects a similar phallocentric viewpoint and double standard in his travelogue. To his eyes, for instance, the smart design of the qi pao dress that he saw women wear in Hong Kong properly covered suggestive female body parts, such as the chest, but the fitted design nonetheless showcased the curves of the female body.

In addition to objectifying the physiques of Chinese women, Kanafani, during his visit to the Great Wall of China, makes an interesting yet problematic analogy that compares the Great Wall to the chastity belt used on women. Kanafani is amazed by the scenery of the Great Wall, for 'it spreads for 6,000 kilometres through the Chinese border from East to West, [standing] above the high mountains' (Kanafani, 2015/1965, 253). Crossing the mountains, the Great Wall reminds Kanafani of a belt, which he likens to a woman's chastity belt. This is an interesting metaphor to provide to his Arab readers. By describing China as a woman who preserves her virginity with the help of a chastity belt, Kanafani implies that China is preserving its civilisation from invasion by colonial powers during a period in which Arab peoples – and Palestinians in particular – were seeking to preserve their identity and agency in the face of foreign influence.

Conclusion

Kanafani left China with very positive impressions. His mentor and close friend George Habash recalled that Kanafani was greatly influenced by his 1965 trip (Coffin, 1996, 98). Having left the Chinese mainland for Hong Kong, Kanafani wrote, 'before me is the British world that is trembling on

a small colony, behind me is 700 million people digging the land with footsteps like a thunderstorm' (2015/1965, 302). This contrast between the shaking colonial world and the robust new world expressed Kanafani's hope for new possibilities to overcome colonialism, particularly in Palestine. Although Kanafani's travelogue has been largely forgotten today, it remains extremely relevant for understanding his thought in general and in particular the history of Sino–Arab solidarity building during an era of geo-political turmoil, catalysed above all by decolonisation.

To fully appreciate the nuance and lessons of this text, further scholarship will have to explore other questions that arise from it. Unanswered questions include: what are the other connections Kanafani made between Arab society and Chinese society, particularly his thoughts and observations about Muslim communities in China? Considering his trips were diplomatic in nature and occurred just before the Cultural Revolution, what has been silenced? Finally, scholars will have to explore in more depth a central paradox of the work. Although Kanafani expressed concerns about state propaganda, the implementation of revolutionary ideology, and its effects on people's daily life, he at the same time embraced and acted on the Maoist imperative to use literary works to spread revolutionary ideas. Where does Kanafani draw the line between the acceptable and the unacceptable, between healthy zeal and excessive fervour? Such questions surely have ramifications for the present as well, if only we commit to translating Kanafani's ideas across space and time.

Notes

1 For more on the theme of Arab–Chinese solidarity building, see the work of Michael Gibbs Hill and Wen-chin Ouyang. The latter, in particular, has proven foundational in exploring Sino–Arab cultural exchanges.
2 Nakba, an Arabic word meaning catastrophe, refers to the mass displacement of Palestinian during the 1948 Arab–Israeli war.
3 Beyond Kanafani's literary legacies, several important scholars of Arabic literature and Arabic writers such as M. M. Badawi; Elias Khoury; and Barbara Harlow, the translator of Kanafani's short story collection *Palestinian's Children*, have written about his political commitment and devotion to the Palestinian cause.
4 *Rihla* is a genre of travelogue writing in classical Arabic literature.
5 For a long time, China did indeed adopt a pro-Palestine policy. For example, China did not establish official foreign relations with Israel until 1991.

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11

WRITING DIASPORIC IN-BETWEENNESS

South Asians in Colonial and Postcolonial East Africa in the Novels of M. G. Vassanji[1]

Gargi Binju

M. G. Vassanji was born into a South Asian family in Nairobi and grew up in Dar es Salaam under the erstwhile British Empire. In his novels, Vassanji explores the concept of the 'in-between' to analyse the way in which diasporas shaped by British imperialism impact migrants' identity and social affiliations in the postcolonial world. These migrants remain unwelcome in independent East African nations, are unable to identify with divided India and Pakistan, and are precarious and racialised in the Global North. This theme of being in-between lends legitimacy to diasporic identities while avoiding an oversimplified idea of belonging to a nation-state or religious identity. Vassanji suggests that diasporic identity should not be viewed as facilitating hybridity where individuals possess unrestricted agency to select their affiliations between South Asian and East African identities. Instead, it should be viewed as an intermediate space amid influential power centres where individuals become ensnared and compelled to broker and reconcile their positioning within a broader world. Vassanji's literary works examine the complex notion of South Asian identity and belonging, particularly prior to displacement, highlighting migrants' racialisation during the pre- and post-independence eras. At the same time, he explores the diaspora's involvement in colonial endeavours, such as constructing railroads and implementing credit systems for colonial farmers in the pre-independence years. The protagonist of *The In-Between World* also underlines the role of some South Asians as intermediaries in perpetuating corruption in the years following independence. Thus, for Vassanji, being in-between involves concrete instances where individuals are subjected to global forces such as colonisation. Rather than having complete agency, they possess limited autonomy over their affiliations within communities.

DOI: 10.4324/9781003351986-12

The notion of in-betweenness also has important consequences for examining and appreciating diasporic literature. Before elaborating on the South Asian diaspora in the region, it is necessary to discuss the ways in which the African diaspora has been studied. In his article 'The Quality of Diaspora', Ashraf Rushdy remarks that the African diaspora is different from other diasporas such as the Jewish, the Irish, and the Armenian. This is because, in the case of Africans, diasporic consciousness was formed after they left the coasts to be pushed into slavery abroad. People from different tribes, nations, and ethnicities did not necessarily perceive themselves as belonging to the same community prior to their racialisation. The African diaspora in the Americas did not involve the dispersal of a single nation but rather the dispersal of many communities (Rushdy, 2015). After the second world war, the term diaspora was used to express 'links and commonalities among groups of African descent throughout the world' (Edwards, 2001, 45). The African diaspora stands apart from other forms of diaspora due to unique circumstances. Africans were forcibly enslaved and subsequently developed a sense of being part of a dispersed community abroad, without an established identity prior to their displacement. Unlike other singular nations that experienced dispersal, multiple communities played a role in shaping the African diaspora. Therefore, Brent Hayes Edwards (2001, 2003) urges us to pay attention to the uses of the notion of diaspora in Africa: what it includes and what it glosses over. Similarly, South Asians on Africa's coastline did not necessarily imagine themselves as Asians or South Asians prior to their arrival. They closely identified with their clan, tribe, region, or religion. In the postcolonial state, they were racialised as 'not Africans' and were sometimes forcefully exiled. Nor were they recognised as Africans in their new homes in the Global North, even though they had been granted asylum due to the discriminatory policies of the likes of Idi Amin in Uganda and the leaders of the Zanzibari Revolution. This inquiry into diaspora highlights that race has been a significant criterion for determining eligibility for being included in the African-originated dislocated populations.

In line with the ambitions of this book, my chapter rereads the novels of M. G. Vassanji using three concepts: translation, decolonisation, and diaspora. I ask: What does the 'double' migration of Asian Africans (from South Asia to Africa and then from Africa to the Global North) (Parmar, 2019) tell us about the way in which identity sets of 'African' and 'Asian' are used as categories of inclusion and exclusion? How can translation and decolonisation help us appreciate the ways in which diasporic groups create and negotiate their place in the new location? To answer these questions, this chapter is divided into three parts. First, I define in-betweenness in the fictional works of Vassanji. Subsequently, I explore how cultural translation helps us appreciate the condition of in-betweenness. This is because the author of the novels (who is also a translator of culture) has the responsibility not only

to translate linguistic signs into a foreign language but also to preserve, disseminate, reformulate, and debate diasporic identities. Finally, I ask how in-betweenness decolonises. How might 'in-betweenness', albeit a privileged position, call into question the undemanding hybridity, where the individual is free to choose cultural affiliations? In a broader sense, I would like to examine the mechanisms through which large-scale geopolitical events interpolate cultural and political belongings. What assumptions about who we are and what we may become are challenged or unsettled by literary works on diasporic communities?

Negotiating In-Betweenness

In his public lecture on an event for the Rhodes Must Fall Movement in South Africa, Achille Mbembe wrote that colonisation was the 'negation of time' (2015, n.p.). This is because it is widely assumed that non-European people in Africa did not create anything substantial before the arrival of Europeans. Colonisation was thus the point zero of history. Mbembe adds that many postcolonial nation-states (including those in Africa) were influenced by this idea. They incorrectly considered the eve of independence a starting point in writing the history of Africa from the perspective of non-Europeans (Mbembe, 2015). Consequently, many in the political class of East African countries could justify the exclusion of Asian Africans because they were predominantly brought to African coasts during the colonial period. This served to emphasise the distinction between *the natives* and *the foreigners*. The implication was that Asians were foreign interlopers who had taken advantage of the colonial system and that they needed to be excluded from African society. This argument was further reinforced by the belief that Asians had remained culturally and politically apart and thus could not truly be considered 'natives' of Africa. In Mbembe's analysis, the zero point of history in Africa led to the dismissal and negation of diverse multi-ethnic and heterogeneous affiliations. This phenomenon results in a myopic interpretation of African history while failing to acknowledge or extol its complex histories of contact with other regions, such as South Asia. Vassanji echoes this sentiment by highlighting interrelated stories between South Asia and Africa in his literary works. These observations suggest that unearthing connections across cultures can contribute significantly to contextualising diasporic identity within global dynamics. Therefore, a nuanced examination of colonialism and diaspora is essential in order to illuminate the prevalent historical forces that have shaped the portrayal of diasporic societies while simultaneously highlighting the contemporary formations that hinder the recognition and appreciation of these complex interconnections across cultures.

In many of his novels, Vassanji traces the arrival of South Asians in Africa to show that, first, reaching the new continent was not completely dictated

by colonial policies. His fiction attempts to undo the assumption that the new arrivals were exclusively brought under the indenture system or that they migrated from the subcontinent because of poverty. In the novel *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall*, the author writes:

> for Indians abroad in Africa, it has been said that it was poverty at home that pushed them across the ocean. That may be true but surely there's that wanderlust first, that itch in the sole, that hankering in the soul that puffs out the sails for a journey into the totally unknown?
>
> (Vassanji, 2004, 18)

The people who left the subcontinent for Africa were certainly aware of the circumstances in which they were leaving, as well as the distances involved. Often, there was a premonition of the challenges that might lie ahead, and this was independent of the colonial regime. The individual stories of Vassanji's characters indicate case-specific and historical ways in which this migration took place. Some travellers, like Dhanji Govindji of *The Gunny Sack*, wanted to embark on the journey to make themselves as rich as Sinbad, bringing forth the lucrative pre-colonial networks of the Indian Ocean. Many others, like the protagonist Vikram Lall's mother, had no such utopian ideas. They knew, however, that they were leaving their home for good to settle in a distant place quite unlike their home. Thus, Vassanji's fictional project explores the ways in which the South Asian community negotiated its place and identity in the region. By exploring the narrative arcs of these travellers, Vassanji illuminates the various motivations that drive people to migrate while also highlighting the unique experiences of each migrant.

The heterogeneity of experiences in the contact zone of colonisation does not imply equality. It is imperative to recognise that these encounters were influenced by colonial interests which institutionalised biases and power imbalances. Vassanji's fiction underlines that it was imperative that the South Asian diaspora define its place within colonial East Africa given the context of colonisation. To achieve this goal, the diaspora was mobilised by colonial policy. Asian Africans were thus able to gain access to resources, power, and opportunities in the colonial order. At the same time, they were racialised in the colonial structure and often sought companionship, friendship, and allyship with Africans. Colonialism created a unique context in which a sense of belonging in Africa could be sought after but was simultaneously restricted. Thus, when examining the effects of these interactions on individuals or communities within a postcolonial framework, it is crucial to account for factors that could have unknown implications for intercultural relationships and perceptions. Before discussing in-betweenness in the oeuvre of Vassanji, I elucidate how this notion has been understood in academic literature so as to underline how Vassanji's use of the term is distinct.

The attempt to situate the colonised in the culture of the coloniser goes back to Frantz Fanon, who analyses Creole cultures in the West Indies in context of the imposition of White cultures in the region. In his book *Black Skin, White Masks*, he writes:

> Cultural imposition is easily accomplished (s'exerce facilement) in Martinique. The ethical transit (le glissement éthique) encounters no obstacle. But the real white man is waiting for me. As soon as possible he will tell me that it is not enough to try to be white, but that a white totality must be achieved. It is only then that I shall recognise the betrayal.
>
> (Fanon, 1986, 193)

The *glissement* (shift/sliding/transit) into White culture does not pose much difficulty. However, the 'betrayal' swiftly follows as the Black man tries to assimilate because he is told that he can never be truly White. This 'betrayal' is a criticism of hybridity, as it implies that people of colour can never truly be accepted by the dominant (White) culture. According to Hussein A. Bulhan, Fanon comments on the notion of 'in-between' as he stresses that the adoption of the oppressive culture leads to profound alienation and anguish. Rather than liberating themselves, Fanon argued that the oppressed undermine their own freedom and agency when they acquiesce to their oppressors' cultural hegemony (Bulhan, 1985). Similarly, Christopher C. Sonn et al. underline that the notion of in-betweenness highlights the alienating moments of cultural contact when dominated groups must choose between upholding their own culture and being expected to assimilate into dominant groups for survival or advancement in a colonial context (2013). When dominated groups are forced to adopt elements of the dominant culture, they need to find an awkward and alienating balance between their own identity and fulfilling the expectations of dominant groups.

However, cultural in-betweenness can be a source of strength when it is not viewed as cultural assimilation, a process in which the colonised adopts the culture of the coloniser. Underlining cultural contacts between racialised and colonised people leads to a new and hybrid culture that is both indigenous and diasporic. Studying V. S. Naipaul, Homi Bhabha develops the positive aspects of in-betweenness and writes, 'Naipaul's people are vernacular cosmopolitans of a kind, moving in-between cultural traditions, and revealing hybrid forms of life and art that do not have a prior existence within the discrete world of any single culture or language' (1994, xiii). Bhabha implies that Naipaul's characters are not simply people who have adopted elements of other cultures. Rather, they have created new and unique cultures that are a blend of their own culture and the cultures they have encountered. This *willed* hybridity is what makes Naipaul's characters so interesting and so relevant to our own time. Bhabha further states that the in-between '*splits*

the difference between self and the Other so that both positions are partial; neither sufficient unto itself' (1994, 72; emphasis in original). When we split the difference between self and the other, we acknowledge that the self is not the only source of knowledge or truth, and the other is not the only source of difference or otherness. This requires us to be open to new ideas and experiences and to question our own assumptions and beliefs.

Moreover, the in-between space undoes national homogeneity. Bhabha argues that rather than the dichotomy of an intrinsic, self-defining nation and external other nations, in-betweenness introduces an interim temporality that disrupts the notion of a homogeneous populace (1994, 212). Bhabha argues that this 'in-betweenness' undermines the nation-state in two ways. First, it disrupts the idea of the nation as a self-generating unit. If national identity is not fixed or essential, then it cannot be produced by the nation itself, and it must be constantly negotiated and renegotiated through interactions with other cultures and identities. Second, the 'in-betweenness' disrupts the idea of the nation as a homogeneous unit. If national identity is heterogeneous, then it cannot be represented by a single, unified voice. Instead, it must be represented by a plurality of voices, reflecting the diversity of the nation's population.

I examine in the following paragraphs how Vassanji's illustration of in-betweenness is different. There are three prominent ways in which Vassanji's fiction evaluates in-betweenness. First, the starting point for Vassanji is, surprisingly, the racial stereotypes through which the community is identified. The child narrator Vikram Lall writes, 'I was smaller, with pointed elvish ears, my skin annoyingly "medium", as I described it then. Neither one (white), nor the other (black)' (Vassanji, 2004, 25). This portrayal underlines Vikram's in-betweenness within the colonial racial hierarchy. The protagonist playfully puts himself between the two races by describing his skin as 'medium'. However, this position is quickly questioned by showing the racial distinctions and similarities between Africans and South Asians in various instances in these novels. Sakina Dadi, a Masai woman married to an Indian, is described as 'distinct'. She is taller than Vikram's grandmother, skinnier and long-legged, however, she is also described as 'dark . . . in a way some Indians were' (37). The interracial son of Dhanji Govindji is compared to Bhim (Vassanji, 1989), an endearingly gluttonous Hindu mythological figure. These examples illustrate that although South Asians' in-between racial positions (as neither White nor Black) fell in between categories within the colonial racial hierarchy, their actual social status was fluid after matrimonial and familial relationships were forged.

Second, Vassanji's fiction highlights the role of South Asian diasporic individuals as mediators between colonial farmers and Africans. These South Asians were an integral part of the colonial structure and served as a vital link between the governing forces and the locals. Vikram Lall's father was a

creditor in the colonial economy, on whose loans the colonial farms functioned. Even Mahesh Uncle, who helps the anti-colonial Mau Mau movement, is employed as a supplier to the settlers, providing 'materials to make even bigger dwellings on land taken away from the Africans' (Vassanji, 2004, 119). Those who tried to advance Kenyan independence perpetrated their own damage. The young protagonist loses his two pre-teenage friends, and innocent people – Amini and Mwangi – are tortured and killed amid the colonial justice system. No matter how hard the diaspora tried to negotiate their place in the colonial system, they could not predict the consequences of their actions that invariably bolstered colonial structures.

Third, the situation of South Asian East Africans post-independence is little better, in that they find themselves blamed for colonial policies. The educated Vikram Lall has many doors shut on him, as this is the time for 'reverse racism' (Vassanji, 2004, 239). He proves unsuccessful in professions traditionally associated with the Asian community: working in the diamond business, as a fixer whitewashing money, and so on. He becomes an intermediary between the donors and beneficiaries in the corruption schemes that this time also includes Kikuyu leaders. The protagonist prefers his place 'in the middle' and watches the events play out in front of him. This interstitial location is presented as his 'natural place' (Vassanji, 2004, 285). He believes that by not taking sides, he is a tiny cog in the wheel and could not have made any difference in the scheme of things. Despite this belief in his own insignificance, Vikram remains a pivotal figure in the corruption schemes portrayed in the novel, as he establishes a connection between the two parties. He becomes part of the system that finances coups and political instability in Africa (346).

Finally, the dynamics of belonging among members of the South Asian diaspora are further complicated by the pervasive racism and discrimination that they face, despite their efforts to build communities, access resources, and attain power. This condition of being in-between challenges notions of hybridity and cosmopolitanism that are used in the postcolonial theory I outlined earlier. It is not a source of 'betrayal', because the diaspora complicates the stark distinction between the native and the coloniser. Vassanji's fiction demonstrates that there existed a range of complex ways for Asians to belong in Africa. Thus, it is unjustifiable to subsume the entire community under a singular category which excludes others who do not fit neatly into the framework. The novelist emphasises how members of the South Asian diaspora have been subject to racialisation in both the pre- and post-independence periods. At the same time, Vassanji's work sheds light on the complex relationship between the diaspora and the littoral, particularly with respect to the involvement of South Asians in colonial projects, such as railway construction and credit systems that financed colonial farmers. Moreover, Vassanji highlights how post-independence corruption, perpetuated by intermediaries from the diaspora, further complicates this dynamic. Therefore, the concept

of in-betweenness depicted in his writings is complex. This in-betweenness is a state of being caught up in global forces that mandate limited choices rather than one in which an individual has complete agency over affiliations and movements within communities.

Translated People, Translating People

Having defined in-betweenness in the oeuvre of M. G. Vassanji, this section elaborates on how diaspora is mediated through translation. Translation is a powerful tool that allows the movement of culture and ideas between different communities. Translation and diaspora are intricately interconnected concepts that involve crossing borders. The Latin prefix trans- in translation signifies movement across or beyond boundaries. As such, since the 1990s postcolonial scholars have extensively employed translation as a key tool for the analysis of writing about diaspora (Asscher, 2021). Translation serves as a mechanism of adaptation and transformation, enabling individuals within the diasporic community to bridge geographical, cultural, and linguistic distances between their homeland and the host country. This not only facilitates communication but also enables diasporic people to navigate complex sociocultural landscapes while maintaining aspects of their heritage identity through language mediation strategies offered by translational practices.

I employ the concept of cultural translation that lays emphasis on the navigation of complex sociocultural contexts. A concept of contestation and fluidity, cultural translation is used across disciplinary boundaries and most prominently within the discourses of anthropology and cultural studies. It has been employed in anthropology to reveal the interpretations through which disparate cultural communities navigate their existence (Asad, 1986). Talal Asad's work has been deployed widely in the field of anthropology to underline the significance of language usage in ethnographical studies. The translation of cultures became the distinctive pursuit of social anthropology to unravel the entangled threads of meaning woven by diverse groups (Lienhardt, 1953). Cultural studies, on the other hand, explore the transformative dimensions of cultural translation, unfurling the diverse forms of negotiation and displacement that unfold when individuals traverse the boundaries of cultural communities. Tina Steiner argues that the difference between cultural and linguistic translation is a 'false one'. She contends that all linguistic translation is cultural translation and that 'juxtaposition in texts of different languages where no explanation or translation is offered to the reader' also functions within the realm of translation (2010, 302). Writing in the early 2000s, T. V. Longinovic advances the use of this notion in cultural studies by arguing that the 'impossibility of absolute sameness' in translation offers a horizon wherein cultural identity takes shape as a dynamic exchange of meanings, unfettered by hierarchical constraints

(Longinovic, 2002, 7–8). His thesis has been supported by Boris Buden et al., who argue that from this perspective cultural translation reveals its innately hospitable nature as an ethical undertaking that harbours the potential for positive social transformation (2009). However, amid theoretical abstraction, some critics have voiced concerns. They admonish the scholarly preoccupation with commentary, neglecting the finer granularities of textual analysis, as articulated by Lawrence Venuti (2003). More recently, translators Kavita Bhanot and Jeremy Tiang (2022) have highlighted individual cases of diverse English language translators and publication houses to show how translation practices, despite the diversity of the people in both cultures, re-emphasise colonial and hierarchical notions. Yet, even amidst these debates, the framework of (cultural) translation is used in scholarly literature to illuminate the intricacies of immigrants and newcomers as they traverse the cultural landscapes of their adopted communities and the blurring of the lines between the foreign and the familiar to engender dynamic relationships that challenge conventional categorisations. In this interplay between cultural communities, cultural translation helps us refocus on the meanings associated with the use of foreign words, dismantle boundaries between identities, and reanalyse diasporic experiences.

The utilisation of (cultural) translation provides a valuable framework for comprehending the concept of in-betweenness in Vassanji's works. This is because cultural translation serves as a powerful analytical tool for understanding the dynamics of diasporic experiences and the negotiation of cultural boundaries. As such, we can investigate the transformative dimensions of cultural exchange and understand how individuals negotiate living between different cultural communities. Steiner has previously brought attention to the diasporic negotiations to highlight that these translations not only 'invoke social relation between Africa and the West' but also underline 'more circular relations . . . along the Indian Ocean coast' (Steiner, 2010, 306). These relations are 'circular' as a synecdoche for the Indian Ocean trade dependent on circular monsoon winds between Africa and India. However, 'circular' also highlights that these translations depict relations that are more complex than a simple division between Africa and Europe or colonised and the coloniser.

I investigate the influence of translation on in-betweenness and its impact on shaping diasporic identity to argue that translation serves as a mediator between languages and cultures, creating a bridge that facilitates navigation through diverse identities within cross-cultural spaces. This research highlights the compromises involved in cultural mediation, leading to intercultural dialogue for comprehending the complexity of in-betweenness within diasporic situations. Moreover, by gaining knowledge about different cultural perspectives through translation, we can appreciate disparate values, thereby making this medium even more significant.

The choice of language in Vassanji's novels prompts questions about the intended audience and serves to convey a distinct diasporic identity. In analysing Vassanji's oeuvre through the lens of translation, it is essential to consider the author's audience, as his novels were published after his migration to Canada where they were released by North American publishers Doubleday and Anchor. The use of the English language is not solely dictated by Vassanji's residence in Canada but also influenced by his proficiency in Gujarati and Kiswahili, tongues which he considers inadequate for novel writing (qtd. in Desai, 2011). The selection of language in his novels is deliberate, incorporating as it does Gujarati, Kutchi, and Kiswahili terms with modified pronunciations and meanings. In its plurality, the diction caters not only to monolingual anglophone readers but also to modern East Africans and South Asians, providing insight into the distinct experiences of diasporic communities. This is because the usage of Gujarati, Kutchi, and Kiswahili terms does not adhere to their standard pronunciation and dictionary meanings. For instance, 'bwana' (Kiswahili) is transformed into 'bana' ('Indianised form, used as "man", etc.' (271)), while 'dukaan' (Gujarati) becomes 'duka' (shop). For what purpose is the translation when it renders expression opaque to all modern readers? This non-standard use of language (now prevalent in non-diasporic contexts too) serves to create a cultural and linguistic divide between the diasporic and originary lands while also emphasising the diaspora's affiliation with the African littoral. This text achieves its objective by utilising opaque terminology limited to coastal regions still strongly associated with the diaspora, thereby emphasising the notions conveyed by a particular vocabulary specific to a culture at the margins that often separate diasporic communities from those back home. In addition to creating a cultural and linguistic divide between the diaspora and Indians, Vassanji underlines the affiliations of the diaspora with the African littoral. Vassanji has remarked that when he is in Gujarat, he has a clear realisation how African he is (qtd. in Rhodes, 1997). If the novel needs to be assigned a fixed location, it should be within East Africa. By employing obscure terminology tied to traditional customs and specific coastal regions, the text highlights the unique cultural context of the diaspora, separating these translated people even from the cultures of their country of origin. In doing so, Vassanji establishes the diaspora's distinct identity and resistance against homogenisation, effectively localising the novel within East Africa and symbolising the diaspora's new centre at the periphery of the African littoral.

The translated and the displaced occupy the periphery across the border. However, they simultaneously create a new centre because they cannot be completely subsumed. Their refusal to be silenced or assimilated creates a powerful alternative to the dominant discourse and allows them to redefine their own identities (Steiner, 2009). This in turn creates a new sense of belonging, community, and solidarity. Diaspora and translation indicate that

the productive locations are those margins that are defiant and unconfinable. Thus, the movement across borders is not only the story of the diaspora but also, more importantly, the politics of this process of rendering people and meanings comprehensible to the receiving cultural landscape (Edwards, 2003). The process of crossing borders is a multifaceted phenomenon that extends beyond the physical movement of individuals between nation-states. It entails the interpretation and contextual comprehension of the experiences of these individuals within the broader socio-political milieu. The experiences of migrants are not only significant in themselves but also in how they contribute to and are interpreted in the context of larger social and political movements.

'To Walk Those Imaginative Landscapes'

While the history of the diaspora needs to be situated in East Africa, translation brings forth the visual gaps in writing. Brent Hayes Edwards (2001, 2003) shows that translation is not essentially a matter of verbal representation but is also a translation of images and visual artefacts. In the diasporic claim to history, what is visually represented and what is not is especially important.

In considering how diasporic identities are made, negotiated, confined, and contested, the author's work should be considered in conversation with history writing. The author claims that his books are written based on archival study of sources of East Africa (qtd. in Desai, 2011). The novel *The Gunny Sack* draws on the works of academic historians. Sona looks for notes and testimonials to reconstruct the pre-colonial history of East Africa. Kala, the protagonist, provides the sources for an academic to write the history of the region. These sources are his inheritance from Ji Bai: notes and diaries from his great-grandfather. Furthermore, Vassanji claims that he is a folk historian and that the future historian of culture will also have 'to walk those imaginative landscapes' created by his fiction (1985, 63). The memories of those who lived during that time, including South Asians, are an important source for recreating colonial East Africa. Asian Africans have a unique perspective on the region's history, culture, and development. This perspective cannot be replicated or understood without their first-hand experience. Indeed, their memories, stories, and experiences are invaluable in helping to create an accurate picture of colonial East Africa.

Another interesting concept from Edwards can help describe the use of translations in the novel, namely 'the taste of the archive' (2012). He defines it as the enticing and inviting of the senses that draws readers into an archive. The novel is an exploration of the colonial past through the lens of Asian Africans, their stories, and the details of their lives. The novel invites the reader to explore and discover the past through the archives of

their memories in a way that is both captivating and stimulating. Régine Michelle Jean-Charles comments on the idea of 'the taste of the archive' to ask whether this taste is used to depict a sense of the inexplicable. She puts it straightforwardly: 'How do you describe the taste of the archive?' (Jean-Charles, 2012). The metaphor of taste underscores those defiant 'artefacts and materials' that resist translation. A good explanation for this use of sensory material to recuperate diasporic experiences may be found in the book *The Taste Culture Reader*. In this book, Carolyn Korsmeyer argues that an ethnographic study of sensorial materials can be used to theorise in the social sciences. Put more concretely, the experiences of individuals are often too narrow to explain macro-level process. However, sensory artefacts serve as a means to access both the micro- and the macro-level processes of society, polity, economy, and culture (Korsmeyer, 2017).[2] As communities in East Africa engage in cultural translation, Vassanji writes for Asian Africans as a way of engaging with the recalcitrant artefacts of the diaspora, the intermixing of languages: bana and duka. Transmuting and construing meanings for one another, these sonorous artefacts depict colonial East Africa in all its complexity. Through his work, Vassanji provides a way to remember and honour the diverse elements of the region's cultural history. He helps East African communities connect meaningfully with colonial history and make sense of its violence.

'Alternative Subjectivities and Relationships'

The recalcitrant artefacts of the diaspora can be read as a record of a less racially stratified society. These artefacts or proofs of non-hierarchical relations between the different communities in South Asia, which have survived despite the oppressive forces of colonialism, are evidence of the diverse and complex cultural and social practices of people from different backgrounds. Today, they also demonstrate the potential for a society to exist without the rigid racial hierarchies that were imposed by colonial powers.

The author highlights the significance of interracial relationships in challenging colonial societies' hierarchical divisions. The portrayal of such relationships allows for a counter-discursive reading of colonialism, creating a space for historically marginalised groups' narratives. The author's emphasis on interracial relationships is exemplified in the story of the narrator Vikram Lall's great-uncle, who marries a Maasai woman who in turn integrates completely into the Asian community. Such relationships were often condemned by communities due to deeply entrenched social and cultural norms. Fear of losing trade opportunities in the region is one reason Dhanji Govindji in *The Gunny Sack* marries a South Asian woman, relegating his African wife and son to a lower position in the family. This highlights how colonial hierarchies were not just political or economic but also intertwined with social

and cultural structures that engendered and perpetuated hierarchies that led to marginalisation and the exclusion of certain groups.

According to Vassanji, interracial relationships had the potential to desegregate communities, bringing together members of different racial and economic classes and enabling greater economic and social mobility for disenfranchised groups. The narrator of *The Gunny Sack* laments:

> In time a son was born to him and Bibi Taratibu, whom they named Huseni. Tell me, Shehrbanoo, would the world be different if that trend had continued, if there had been more Husenis, and if these chocolate Husenis with curly hair had grown up unhindered.
>
> (1989, 11)

Through the birth of Huseni, a possibility is engendered for the narrator to contemplate an alternative postcolonial Africa. He ponders the transformative reverberations that could have permeated East Africa had intermingling persisted and engendered a proliferation of interracial children. The evocative imagery of 'chocolate Husenis with curly hair' epitomises the striking blend of South Asian and African physiognomies. Implicit in this query is the notion of unhindered and unburdened existence, intimating the absence of societal constraints and impediments of the surrounding (colonial and racial) hierarchies and customs. Tina Steiner argues that these relationships are also a reflection of a less (racially) stratified society and an attempt to emphasise 'alternative subjectivities and relationships' (2010, 302). However, Vassanji notes that these relationships were often met with condemnation due to deeply entrenched social and cultural norms, often resulting in ostracism. The author also highlights that even in the postcolonial context where politicians clamoured for Asian women to marry African men, interracial children seldom found acceptance due to their unique heritage, not being fully accepted by either of their parents' cultures. In *The Gunny Sack*, Huseni's grandson (Huseni is the interracial child of Dhanji Govindji and his African wife) is unable to find acceptance from his friends and partners during his military service, despite his African ancestry and efforts to assimilate. What matters is the way the individual identifies himself (as Asian) in order for discrimination to occur.

The analysis of in-betweenness in Vassanji's works through the lens of cultural translation encompasses several important aspects. First, it acknowledges the significance of representation in shaping diasporic identities, shedding light on how they contribute to a wealth of interpretations within cultural communities. Second, it considers the critical perspectives raised by scholars like Lawrence Venuti, who emphasise the need for a nuanced analysis beyond commentary-focused approaches to translation. Third, my analysis also explored the deliberate use of non-standard language in Vassanji's

novels that serves to convey a distinct diasporic identity. Further, by shifting focus on the intercommunity interactions through the new diasporic vocabulary, Vassanji's fiction depicts interracial relationships as having the potential to challenge the prevailing social and cultural norms in East Africa. Ultimately, Vassanji's nuanced portrayals of interracial relationships showcase the potential to challenge, albeit complicatedly, social and cultural norms.

Diaspora and Decolonisation

In the previous section, I elaborated on how diasporic identity is mediated by cultural translation. This section of the chapter deals with the other concept that is the subject of the inquiry in this volume: decolonisation. Decolonisation is an attempt to move away from the colonial systems of power, knowledge, and representation in order to create new paradigms that are more equitable and just. It is a process of critical reflection, of reimagining and recreating the world, a process that seeks to challenge and disrupt the existing structures of power and privilege (Gopal, 2021; Halvorsen and Zaragocin, 2021). Linking decolonisation and diaspora, Ipek Demir puts forth that studies of empire and diaspora often ignore how 'diaspora can become agents of decolonisation' (4) 'and how [diaspora] question[s] unequal and hierarchical relationship entrenched in empire' (2022, 137). Demir's argument is important because it underlines that diasporas are not passive bystanders to the decolonisation project and that this aspect of reimagination and critical reflection are crucial to an inquiry into the diaspora and empire.

Vassanji's oeuvre has so far been analysed as postcolonial fiction (Malak, 1993; Primorac, 2008; Zacharias, 2014). The concept of postcoloniality is temporal. The question it contains is: what comes after colonisation? By contrast, decolonisation ostensibly underlines an action-oriented process meant to challenge and eliminate ideas that reinforce hierarchical structures in society. This lens of analysis paves the way for the possibility of critiquing more than just the Global North and colonial powers. A decolonial approach also allows us to better understand the implications of Vassanji's writing in Asian and African societies. Decolonisation as an analytical tool provides us with a deeper understanding of the effects of colonisation and how it has shaped the dynamics between different societies.

How can diaspora decolonise? The larger debate is not about exactly what diaspora is, what it includes, what it excludes, and how it is to be configured. Ashraf Rushdy says this of the African diaspora: 'It was more about the role diaspora could play in a larger political struggle that began with the original diasporic event of the slave trade itself' (2015, 291). Rushdy argues that the African diaspora has the potential to challenge and ultimately decolonise oppressive systems because it exposes the deeply unequal histories of the movement of people. However, paying attention to the other

African diaspora that was forcibly exiled post-independence from the empire, I draw insights into how such hierarchical structures and identity sets are maintained. I show that the Asian African diaspora not only decolonises the Global North but also postcolonial Africa. Examining how the historical context of postcolonial littoral shapes diasporic identity, I ask how the act of writing about the Asian diaspora in Vassanji's texts challenges hegemonic discourses in Africa.

The malleability of diasporic identities is not based on individuals but on historical forces outside the control of a single person or a particular community. The protagonist Vikram of the novel *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall* is not entirely independent of the circumstances in which he grew up, that is, postcolonial Dar:

> Here I was, a young Asian graduate in an African country, with neither the prestige or whiteness or Europeanness behind me, nor the influence and numbers of a local tribe to back me, but carrying instead the stigma from a generalised recent memory of an exclusive race of brown 'Shylocks' who had collaborated with the colonisers. What could I hope to achieve in public service? Black shamanism and reverse racism was the order of the day against Asians.
>
> (238–239)

Employing a sombre, frustrated tone, the passage expresses the protagonist's disillusionment with the racism he faces as an Asian in a postcolonial African nation. He feels doubtful about his prospects for success in public service. He paints himself as a 'young Asian graduate' devoid of the 'prestige or whiteness or Europeanness' that might aid his station. Additionally, he portrays an environment of 'Black shamanism and reverse racism' that the protagonist finds unjust. His sophisticated vocabulary ('postcolonial', 'prestige', 'stigma', and 'collaborators') seems at odds with the racial discrimination he encounters, heightening the sense of injustice. This erudite diction underscores the disconnect between the prejudice he faces and his own articulate voice. Furthermore, the reference to Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* through the mention of 'Shylocks' underlines that Asians are viewed as untrustworthy outsiders, in a similar way to dangerous anti-Semitic stereotyping.

As a member of the South Asian diaspora, the protagonist is unable to find work and ends up as a go-between in a corruption scandal and, hence, its enabler. Although his justification for such conduct raises questions, he claims that 'I long believed that mine were crimes of circumstance, of finding oneself in a situation and simply going along with the way of the world' (344). His role exposes the complicity of the political classes in Africa. At the end of the novel, the protagonist asks who benefited the most from the corruption schemes. It was not the Asian community, because they were forcefully exiled

from their homes in the end. Asian communities played a role in oppressing Africans during colonialism, which has been well documented in historical research (Gregory, 1981; Jones, 2007; Oonk, 2013). However, according to Vikram, blaming the entire Asian community for post-independence corruption schemes is the result of reverse racism and the African political class disavowing its own partial responsibility. Consequently, the South Asian community on the littoral is unfairly suffering for the actions of a few, while the political class is not held accountable for their own wrongdoings.

Peter Simatei has argued that the very act of writing the Asian diaspora in Africa is an act of decolonisation. Simatei argues that writing about the Asian presence in East Africa is an attempt to explore connections between Asians and the history of resistance, whether it is resistance to colonial forces or contact with African communities. Official discourses on postcolonial nation-building actively suppress these histories by amplifying stereotypes of Asians as foreign collaborators and ignoring periods in history where African communities also collaborated with colonial Europeans (Simatei, 2011). Consequently, there is an absence of critical and measured accounts of the Asian presence in East Africa, which has also been shaped by diverse motivations, experiences, and relationships with African communities. Writing about the Asian presence in East Africa is important because it can provide a complete and accurate understanding of the history of the region. Such an understanding can also be used to challenge hegemonic discourses that are often used to oppress dominated groups and delegitimise their struggles. Nalini Iyer echoes this argument by stating that by being in-between, one recognises the absence of a dominant narrative of belonging or citizenship. Vassanji's works demonstrate that 'cultural and national identities are fluid, individually negotiated, occasionally transgressive, historically contingent, and often underplayed by comic realities' (2011, 206). In other words, identity is not static and unchanging but something that is constantly evolving and adapting based on one's experiences and environment. By emphasising the malleability of identity, Vassanji's works show that subjectivity is something that is continuously created and recreated, shaped by the ever-changing contexts in which one finds oneself.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have analysed the works of M. G. Vassanji and examined the representation of the Asian African diaspora through the lenses of translation and decolonisation. The 'double' migration of Asian Africans, from South Asia to Africa and then from Africa to the Global North (Parmar, 2019), illuminates how diaspora has been utilised to both include and exclude communities, as well as to racialise them. The exile of Asians from East Africa was based on the belief that they remained culturally and politically separate

and thus could not be considered natives. However, the notion of in-betweenness challenges the assumption that Asians were culturally distinctive and not fully integrated into Africa while still acknowledging their cultural heritage and prejudices. This is because the concept of in-betweenness distances the diaspora from the original homelands, thus highlighting the nuances of Asian African integration and challenging the stereotype of an unassimilated cultural other.

By emphasising the complexity of Asian–African contact, M. G. Vassanji's novels present a compelling examination of (cultural) translation and decolonisation. Emphasising the (cultural) translations enabled me to uncover the range of cultural interactions seen through the Asian diaspora and to provide insights into the transformative potential of language mediation and adaptation within diasporic communities by transforming words and expressions used stereotypically into creative possibilities for the diaspora to talk about itself. The chapter also facilitated a critical examination of the power dynamics and hierarchies embedded within the process of translation itself.

Within the framework of decolonisation, Vassanji's novels shed light on the pivotal role of the Asian African diaspora in challenging stereotypes and biases associated with Asians while promoting a more comprehensive understanding of the history of the East African littoral. By writing about the experiences of the Asian diaspora in Africa, these narratives actively disrupt hegemonic discourses and identity sets in the littoral as they challenge discourse that goes beyond simplistic divisions of Black and White, colonised and coloniser, the haves and the have-nots and, consequently, contribute to a variegated portrayal of the region's historical landscape.

To conclude, I contend that Vassanji's fiction eschews prevailing metanarratives that propound homogeneous conceptions of belonging and citizenship. Instead, his fiction elucidates the protean, heterogeneous nature of cultural and national identity. These constructs are depicted as contingent, negotiated, and mercurial. Their conceptualisation reflects both the idiosyncrasies of individuated experience and the exigencies of discrete historical contexts and the disjunction between theoretical explications of collective identity and the unruly, quotidian realities on the ground. As such, the notion of being in-between foregrounds the gaps between reified ideas of fixed identity and the messy actualities of lived experience by problematising monolithic discourses on identity and illuminating multifarious and contextual character of belonging. Diasporic in-betweenness repudiates shibboleths of innate identity, foregrounding the socially constructed, provisional nature of identity.

Notes

1 I would like to thank my doctoral supervisor, Prof. Russell West-Pavlov, for his guidance throughout the writing of this chapter. This research would not have been possible without his invaluable support.

2 I am thankful to Prof. Claire Chambers for this reference.

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12

TRANSLATION AS ACTIVISM, TRANSLATORS AS ACTIVISTS

Maureen Freely

Can translation be a tool for resisting colonisation? In the literary field, at least, it already is. I can point to a multitude of periodicals, programmes, and initiatives in this country alone – online and offline, recent and not so recent, inside the academy and outside it – all working explicitly and often in unison towards this noble aim. Indeed, in the early years of this century, Britain's cultural sector experienced its own translation turn. A consortium of writers' and translators' organisations (the British Centre for Literary Translation, English PEN, the Translators Association, the Society of Authors, the Arvon Foundation, Literature Across Frontiers, Modern Poetry in Translation, the Poetry in Translation Centre, Free Word, the British Library, and the body now known as the National Centre for Writing, amongst others) began to work, together and in parallel, to bring new literatures and new voices to Anglophone readers in a direct challenge to an increasingly insular, post-imperialist, difference-blind market. In this we were aided, and often guided, by (inter alia) the British Council, Open Society, the London Book Fair, the Siegrid Rausing Foundation, the Gulbenkian Foundation, and, most significantly, Arts Council England.

As a board member and later chair of the Translators Association between 2007 and 2014, and as president and chair of English PEN between 2014 and 2021, I was variously a witness, an enabler, or an active participant in this multifaceted intervention, which also sought to forge national and international links with universities and literature festivals, as well as mainstream and independent publishers of literary translations. Our aim has been to provide support and guidance for translators, publishers, and readers every step of the way.

DOI: 10.4324/9781003351986-13

This has led to the creation of summer schools, residential courses, residencies, degree programmes, mentorships, and information-sharing networks for emerging literary translators. All are implicitly committed to bringing in new literatures and voices. Some (like NCW's Visible Communities) have the explicit aim of strengthening links with the UK's diasporic communities and diversifying access routes to translation. There are two gatherings annually (the London Book Fair's Literary Translation Centre in the spring and International Translation Day in the autumn) that connect emerging translators to the full translator–activist community, as well as established literary translation strands at leading literature festivals such as Hay and Edinburgh that bring our community into direct conversation with the reading public.

English PEN's translation wing, PEN Translates, has funded the translation costs for hundreds of books over the last two decades. For a full list, see English PEN World Bookshelf (www.englishpen.org/translation/the-world-bookshelf/). Because all grants are based on literary merit, the PEN Translates logo has also served as a sort of quality mark. Meanwhile, the Translators Association sponsors eight translation prizes for work originally written in Arabic, French, German, Hebrew, Italian, Spanish, and Japanese. It also oversees a prize for a first translation. The Foreign Fiction Prize, run along modest lines by Arts Council England and the *Independent*, has now been superseded by the Man Booker International Prize. The latter, with its ample funding and powerful marketing arm, has greatly increased the visibility (and from a publishing perspective, viability) of literary translation. In the seven years of its current iteration, all but one of its winning authors, and all but two of its winning books, have come from outside Western Europe. The award is shared between the author and the translator. After the South Korean author Han Kang won the 2015 prize for *The Vegetarian*, this novel's translator, Deborah Smith, used her half of the prize to set up Tilted Axis, a publishing house specialising in new work from Asia. That these prizes have together greatly encouraged publishers embarking on the costly, risky business of literary translation is widely acknowledged in the sector, if only anecdotally.

How to measure impact empirically across the sector remains an open question. The publishing world, with its ever more vertical financialisaton in the mainstream, and its ever wider field of small and struggling but prize-dominating independents, is in progressively greater flux. Any measurement of review attention across the board must take into account the asymmetries in the industry, as well as the severe and continuing reduction of literary review space overall. What metrics we have in the charity sector are confined to reports to funders that necessarily remain confidential. The same can be said of many publishers' print runs and most literary prize submission lists. However, the submission list for the Warwick Prize for Women in Translation, started by colleagues at the University of Warwick and me, is public. I can therefore report that we have seen the number of submissions increase from

fifty-three books in twenty-three languages in 2017 to 153 books and thirty-two languages in 2023. I can point to the digital magazine *Words Without Borders*, since 2003 the largest digital publisher of contemporary world literature; to the literary journal *Asymptote*, which over the past twelve years has featured work from 128 countries and 115 languages; and to PEN Transmissions, English PEN's newer online journal of international writing, where writers from across the world can co-create spaces for conversation on their own terms. Finally, as the 2023 chair of the Royal Society of Literature International Fellow Programme, now entering its fourth year, I can attest to the translator–activist network's commitment to taking literary translation into the epicentre of our literary establishment.

Have their collective efforts had an impact? Yes, and thanks to detailed reporting required by today's cultural funders and as outlined previously, they have the metrics to prove it. As they set out together and separately to secure further funding, they will make full use of those metrics, as indeed they should. They will also want to mention that in the summer of 2023 the *New York Times Book Review* devoted a full issue to the art of literary translation, signalling its growing importance, and that Nielsen Bookscan, the UK industry's data provider, has described the under-35s as Generation TF (where 'TF' stands for Translated Fiction).

But metrics, like monikers, can lie and misdirect and obfuscate. Roads paved with good intentions can unwittingly reinforce old blind spots. Some recent trends in translation studies might be seen in such a light, most notably David Damrosch's *What Is World Literature?* Although mindful of the asymmetries at work in the creation of the global restaurant it showcases, Damrosch seems more inclined to celebrate world literature's diverse bill of fare than to critically examine the processes through which its offerings travelled from metaphorical farm to table. That said, it would be wrong to overlook the opposing trend, which continues to put translation under the microscope to look for unconscious bias and colonisation by other means.

As someone whose translations have been subjected to such scrutiny, I can only applaud it. This is important and necessary work. Like many or most others who bear across non-Western texts into English, I know that every large and small decision I make is politically charged and never, therefore, above suspicion. What seems right to me will inevitably be wrong in the eyes of A. N. Other. What I believe to have done in good faith will look to have been done in very bad faith to a nationalist or literary purist who sees translation itself as an imperialist enterprise – as it will to any close reader who disagrees with my particular take on domestication and foreignisation, phrasing, or punctuation. That's just the way it is. No one goes into translation expecting consensus. But if my life in translation has been a site of constant turmoil, it has, at the same time, been a revelation – an education that never ends. I suspect it's been the same for many others. If our voices

are largely absent from academic discourse, it's because we struggle to situate our practice within scholarly debates that have, to date, focused more on the texts we produce than on anything we might have to say about their genesis. This, too, may be as it mostly should be.

But if we are talking about activism, it is surely important to hear from the actors: how we got involved in this work in the first place, what we hoped to achieve, what we saw ourselves as resisting, what we hoped to change, how we balanced our political aspirations with our wish to honour the texts we translated as works of art, how we went about providing or refusing context for our Anglophone readers, how we challenged any assumptions or biases those readers might have brought with them, where we think we've succeeded, and, more importantly, where we know we've failed, what we've learned through trial and error that might be of interest to scholars, if only to fellow-travelling scholars who hope to understand translation as a tool to resist colonisation. I offer up what follows as an encouragement to others.

Let me begin, then, with the first page I ever tried to translate, in the autumn of 1977. Actually, it wasn't the first *ever*-ever page. The previous year, while working as an underqualified secretary at Amnesty International in London, I'd been asked to translate the occasional newspaper article or prisoner's letter. It was while I was working there that a member of its executive committee – a Turkish professor of constitutional law – gave me two books by his wife, Sevgi Soysal, who had just died of breast cancer, aged only forty-four. He asked me if I might consider translating them. I said I would try.

The first book was a memoir, set in a woman's political prison. The second was a novel, inspired by Sevgi's time as a court-mandated internal exile in the southeastern city of Adana. I took both books to Greece with me that summer and read them while I was working on what would become my own first novel. Returning to London, I read Sevgi's books again. When I sat down in the autumn of 1977 to translate the memoir, I was still living inside all the pages of both books and in crisis, for they had turned my picture of Turkey inside out.

This is not to say that I was entirely ignorant of the country's history or politics. From the time my family moved to Istanbul in 1960, I'd been hearing about it over supper every night. My father taught physics at an American university at which all but a few of the students were Turkish. He'd fallen in love with the city and devoted his every free hour to exploring it, scouring the library, taking his ever-growing list of questions to his ever-growing circle of devoted students, who did everything they could to enlighten him. He brought his discoveries home with him. There were never any qualms in our house about what to say or not say in front of the children. It was simply assumed that we were born sharing our father's left-leaning passions and aspirations.

So even before the students of Turkey were seized by the spirit of 1968, I had what I might, even now, call a critical understanding of Turkey's place in the cold war. I knew that the US had seventeen military bases on its soil; that Turkey's own enormous army was largely bankrolled by the US; and that in the eyes of our compatriots in Washington, Turkey was the bulwark against communism and the Soviet Union, to be 'protected' at all costs. I had, with my own eyes, witnessed the rise of the student left, sharing many of its views and aspirations, while also becoming, on occasion, its target. This, too, I'd stretched my pained mind to almost understanding: if a mob comes after you, shouting 'Americans go home', there is really no reasoning with them. Really no way of avoiding the obvious, that although my family and I were on their side, we might still have outstayed our welcome. As various classmates had already pointed out to me, we were de facto cultural imperialists.

Just days before I left for university, in the summer of 1970, 75,000 workers protesting draconian new anti-labour laws marched on the city, to be repelled by rubber bullets. During my first year away, there were almost daily anti-American demonstrations, many of which turned into riots. There were Molotov cocktails, kidnappings, occupations of university buildings, and attacks on US targets. And then, on 12 March 1971, just a little over a decade since they had done so the last time, the generals stepped in to restore order. I came home that next summer to a city thus restored. I had heard rumours by then of this colleague or student of my father's or that former classmate of mine who'd been taken into custody. But in Istanbul that summer, no one was talking, least of all to an American.

By the time I went to work for Amnesty International, the army had removed itself to restore democracy. For this, read tutelary democracy, in which a nation's army retains control of democracy's day-to-day running. Nonetheless, there was a great deal in the Turkish press about what the left had suffered in the aftermath of the March 12 coup. And it is not perhaps entirely accidental that I'd ended up in a job that gave me the chance not just to read but to translate them.

As such, I had an idea what had been going on behind locked doors before I read Sevgi Soysal's memoir of her time in political prison. But it was through her stories of everyday life in that converted army barracks that I came to understand what she and so many thousands of others had suffered just by expressing political dissent and also, crucially, how through wit, imagination, and ingenuity, they'd kept each other going behind bars. I sat down to translate this memoir so that others could learn from it, just as I had.

Then came that first page. That first paragraph. That first line, which turns an old proverb on its head. Here's the proverb, translated literally: March peeks through the door, burns picks and shovels. The implication is that the weather can turn so bitter in March that you end up burning the handles of your picks and shovels to keep warm. In applying that proverb to the generals

who forced the government to resign on 12 March 1971, Sevgi wishes to say that they went one better. Instead of burning picks and shovels, they began to burn people. When she goes on to list the ways in which they burned people – by throwing them into prison, for example, or broadcasting hysterical lists of fugitives on national radio and television nightly – she extends her play on words. For while a person burned in Turkish can be a person destroyed, damaged, or injured by heat or fire, it can also be a person chased into a corner from which there is no escape. Sevgi's Turkish readers will have no trouble grasping her double meaning, nor will they stop to ask themselves why those leading the manhunts are never named – not even as generals, in the plural. Not even as pronouns. This is because Turkish is very comfortable in the passive voice. Ominously comfortable: it was done. It is known.

On the second page, with Sevgi's account of her own capture, her voice becomes more conversational. In the absence of metaphors and passive voices, I had more direct access to the bright and furiously witty voice that would propel her, and me, through the rest of her memoir. Of course, that bright and furiously witty voice rings through from the first line in Turkish. I felt I had to find a way to do the same in English. This meant casting just a bit of light on the proverb and mentioning the generals once, before reducing them to pronouns, and making it clear, in as few words as possible, what Sevgi meant by the 12th of March. I was, even then, aware that these were controversial choices – I was perhaps bowing too deeply to the ignorant Anglophone reader. Exposing myself as the cultural imperialist I wished I wasn't. I can take some comfort in remembering that it's still not too late. If I ever get a translator's contract for *Yildirim District Women's Prison* (and it does seem a bit more likely, now that I have found a good home for *Dawn*, the other book by Sevgi Soysal that I first read in 1977), I shall certainly go back to that first page and reconsider.

I did try to place it with a publisher all those years ago – forty-five, to be exact. But here we come to the monolith that keeps so many of us would-be activist–translators from achieving much of anything: the market. I was informed, again and again, that no one outside Turkey was interested in reading about it. Yes but, I protested. Yes but. Sevgi's book was not just about Turkey. It was about America and its cold-hearted cold war diplomacy. Well perhaps, was the reply. But the fact remains . . .

If that fact no longer remains, it is because Turkey's position in the world has changed over the past half-century. It is no longer NATO's last defence against communism. All but two of the US bases are long gone. American influence has waned and waned. Since Recep Tayyip Erdoğan came to power in the first years of this century, Turkey has refused, on many occasions, to do Washington's bidding. It has sought new alliances and new markets in its bid to establish itself as a regional power while integrating into the global economy. It has, at the same time, become a tourist destination. So these days

no one ever asks me where it is on the map or if I went to school on a camel, as they almost always did back in the day. When my family first moved to Turkey, travel beyond its borders was the province of the rich and privileged. Now there are Turkish guest workers in large numbers almost everywhere in Europe. Also among us are the leftists and Kurds from Turkey who came here as political refugees, and there is hardly a university in Europe or North America or Australia that does not have a significant Turkish presence.

It was while these great changes were unfolding that a tiny number of Turkish writers came to international notice. But even as their stars rose, there remained a strange cultural lag. A studied indifference to any art coming out of Turkey – a stubborn reluctance, on occasion, to acknowledge that Turkey might have a culture. As Orhan Pamuk's translator during the years leading up to his 2006 Nobel Prize, I got to experience such attitudes at first hand. When the *Guardian* did an author profile on the eve of the publication of Orhan's *Istanbul: Memories and a City*, which I had translated, the profiler asked me how a 'country like Turkey' could produce a writer of such sophistication. At the opening of a splendid exhibition of Ottoman and Turkish art at the Royal Academy that same year, a television presenter asked me why she'd never until that moment heard a thing about it. My answer was to redirect the question: why hadn't she?

I did, of course, have the beginnings of answer. From my father's suppertime disquisitions and the books in his study, I'd long known that the Ottoman empire had loomed large in the Western imagination throughout its 600-year history. That the fascination, though richly decorated with Orientalist fantasies, had been at its base geopolitical. That the fear of Ottoman expansion had faded once the industrial revolution gave Europe the technological advantage. That from the mid-nineteenth century, every Western power of any consequence was busy developing its own sphere of influence inside the empire – dispensing the military, political, and economic expertise the Ottomans so desperately needed. Not only that, but these Western powers were building schools, hospitals, and places of worship which might have been open to all had the Porte permitted the proselytising of Muslims. Instead, they had ended up healing and educating only the region's non-Muslim subjects, greatly improving their prospects, while also using them as pawns in the imperial competitions that were known in polite society as the Eastern question.

Having grown up on the campus of one of the few Western schools that had survived Turkey's passage from empire to republic, I knew that the fiercer nationalists of Ankara would have been happy to shut us down – that one wrong move could get us all expelled. Even as children, we knew better than to ask why. As one of Robert College's historians, my father been allowed into the institution's archives. So I should have known why its trustees in New York were reluctant to dwell too long on the years between the empire's

collapse in 1919 and the founding of the republic in 1923. As it turned out, most of the records from those years had mysteriously disappeared. Had I been required, like all Turkish students at my American lycée, to study Turkish history as mandated and strictly administered by Ministry of Education, I would have had a sense, however biased, of what had transpired over those four years. But I had been exempted, on account of being American, so I was ill equipped to explain (to myself in the first instance) how a famously multicultural empire had turned so fast and decisively into a deeply nationalist, minority-hostile nation.

I came to this, the second chapter of my education, as I'd come to the first: by way of translation. Of the five books by Orhan Pamuk that I translated between 2002 and 2009, three (*The Black Book*, *Istanbul*, and *Other Colours*) offered rich if also brilliantly oblique reflections on Turkey's uneasy relation with its imperial past and its uncertain identity as a Westward-leaning authoritarian democracy and Muslim-majority secular state. Published in Turkey in full or in part long before Orhan had achieved any sort of recognition in Europe or the Anglophone world and well before he was demonised in Turkey for 'pandering to Europe' and prosecuted for 'insulting Turkishness', these books spoke (sometimes easily and sometimes awkwardly) to a literary tradition that was already, by then, a century and a half old. However, when he and I sat down to review each translation in turn, we were painfully aware that no one in Fortress English knew the first thing about that tradition, nor did they seem to care.

Orhan was rightly adamant that no concessions should be made, no added words of explanation to ease the reader's way. What I'd hoped to do instead was to use what literary devices I had at my disposal to make them want to know and care. That Orhan did most of the work for me is most evident in *Istanbul*'s most famous chapter, about hüzün. This concludes a history of European and Islamic concepts of melancholy with a prose painting of hüzün as manifested in Istanbul's streets. It was left to me to create a trance strong and musical enough to carry that prose painting into English. This, too, added to my education, for as a foreign child in Istanbul, trailing after my father from mosque to church to city wall, I'd been raised to feel awe for the city's great history. But now, living inside my recreation of Orhan's prose painting, I felt the silent shame of those who are left to make a life in its ruins.

It was while I was translating *Istanbul* that this shame and its complex histories found a political voice. By 2005 a small but determined group of Turkish writers, scholars, journalists, and human rights activists – most of them my contemporaries, quite a few of them my father's former students or my former classmates – had been working together for going on a decade to break the almost a century-old taboo around the 1915 Armenian genocide, perpetrated by the Pashas (more specifically the Committee of Union and Progress), who took the Ottoman empire so disastrously into the first world

war. Orhan was on the margins of that group. After making an off-the-cuff remark to a Swiss journalist about a million Armenians having been killed 'in these lands', he became the subject of a hate campaign that culminated in his being prosecuted, along with many others, for insulting Turkishness. If he is alive today, it is because he has returned himself as much as possible to the world of fiction. Had I been as much at risk as he was and still is, I might have done the same. But even though I was, by then, working closely with both English PEN and International PEN on Turkey and writing frequently on the Turkish state's long wars against dissenting writers, I was only really at risk when I appeared with him in public. And though it would certainly be unfair to imply that Orhan cared less than I did about Turkey's precarious Greek, Armenian, and Jewish minorities, the fact is that I cared about them a lot, having grown up amongst them.

I was moved to see my non-Christian, non-Jewish contemporaries standing up for their rights. I thought that their cause should be known outside Turkey. It was during this period that I translated three works of oral history about Turkey's long-silenced Islamicised Armenians. It was with the help of the previously mentioned networks that I was able to place these books with publishers. I never imagined they would receive much attention in the mainstream media. But I did want them to find their way into libraries, there to wait for any scholars who might have assumed, without these books, that no one inside Turkey ever talked or cared of such things. I wanted my translations to educate others as they had first educated me – to prompt in others, as they had in me, questions never before entertained.

In their different ways, all three of these texts gave voice to people who had till then never dared to break their silence, even inside their own families and communities. So what I wanted most of all was to convey the beauty and precarity and music of their first attempts to tell the truth. In other words, I wanted to do more than just translate them accurately. My dream – no doubt carried over from my translations of fiction, not to mention my own fiction – was to do justice to their voices and, in so doing, to invite Anglophone readers to wish to know more about them and the histories they'd had no choice but to hide.

Once again, they invited me to do so first. And here began the third chapter of my education through translation. It still goes on. For a decade or so, I have been reading up on the immediate aftermath of the first world war: when the lands of the fallen Ottoman empire seemed to be there for the taking. When, aided and abetted by Lloyd George, the Greeks invaded western Anatolia, and the British and the French made their competing bids for Anatolia's southeast, and the Americans went everywhere, playing the long game, in preparation for their century, and the Allied forces occupying Constantinople put out a death warrant for Mustafa Kemal – until, after fighting with an ill-equipped army on three fronts for three and a half years, he sent

the Europeans packing, along with Anatolia's 1.4 million remaining Greeks. The republic he founded in 1923 is the only part of the former empire that succeeded in drawing its own borders – as every Turkish schoolchild knows. I am broad-brushing it here because I almost never meet anyone outside Turkey who knows how very hard Turkey's European foes – Britain, France, and Greece – fought to make it otherwise. We are not fully responsible for our ignorance. This imperial adventure never quite made it onto the syllabus, perhaps because it failed. But if we are to understand contemporary Turkey – its nationalist authoritarianism; its paranoia about enemies without and within; and its casting of Turkey's minorities, be they Christian, Jewish, or Muslim, as potential traitors – we need to understand the part Western powers played in the evolution of its political culture. Translations have an important part to play in this conversation, as do translators if, by choice, assignment, or happenstance, they also write under their own names.

How my life in translation has fed into my own fiction is an essay for another day. How it has affected my practice as a translator is for others to judge. It is relevant here only insofar as it speaks to the question that was this chapter's starting point: if translators are to produce translations that have it in them to resist colonisation, they can never stop questioning. They can never know enough history.

Translations

Orhan Pamuk

The Black Book; *Snow*; *Istanbul: Memories and the City*; *Other Colours: Essays and a Story*; *The Museum of Innocence*

Fethiye Çetin and Ayşegül Altınay

My Grandmother; *The Grandchildren*

Sabahattin Ali

Madonna in a Fur Coat (with Alexander Dawe)

Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar

The Time Regulation Institute (with Alexander Dawe)

Sait Faik Abasıyanık

A Useless Man (with Alexander Dawe)

Hasan Ali Toptaş

Shadowless (with John Angliss); *Reckless* (with John Angliss)

Sema Kaygusuz

The Well of Trapped Words: Selected Stories

Tuba Çandar

Hrant Dink: The Life and Death of a Turkish-Armenian Intellectual

Suat Derviş

In the Shadow of the Yalı

Sevgi Soysal

Dawn

Tezer Özlü

Cold Nights of Childhood

13

FINDING OUR WAY

Dialogue Among Our Languages Is the Way to the Unity of African Peoples

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o

This is a great day,[1] and for me, as an African and as a writer, it is certainly one of the happiest days of my life. I began writing novels, short stories, plays, and essays in 1960, when I was a student of English at Makerere University, Uganda, then an affiliate of the University College London. One can easily calculate and see that I have been wielding a pen for at least forty years. From 1960 to 1977 I wrote in English even though all these books were mostly about Kenya and Kenyan people. But from 1977 to the present, I have written my novels, short stories, plays, and books for children in Gĩkũyũ, one of more than thirty African languages in Kenya. Half my writing life, then, was taken up with English, and the other half with Gĩkũyũ.

During that forty-year period, the conferences on African writing in English to which I have been invited have been many and even the ones I have actually attended, starting with the famous 1962 Conference of African Writers of English Expression at Makerere, are countless. Now, in the same period, except for one at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in London, I have never been invited to, or even heard about, a conference called for the sole purpose of discussing literature in African languages. This means that since 1960s – when African countries started gaining their independence – European languages have become the ones setting the terms of the debate on the literature of the continent. In schools and colleges in Africa and abroad, the literature which is taught under the label of African Literature is still mostly written in European languages. All the conferences to which I was invited were about African literature. A writer in any one African country could have been writing solely in an African language for any number of years without ever being heard outside the country. But let another person in the same country write and publish just one novel in

DOI: 10.4324/9781003351986-14

English or French, and she begins to receive invitations to numerous conferences on African literature. Soon she becomes the representative of literature from that country and enters the curriculum. Thus, European languages also determine who is an African writer and who writes for Africa.

The situation of the European and African languages vis-à-vis the continent reminds me of a story I first read in Jomo Kenyatta's (1961/1938) book *Facing Mount Kenya*.[2] The story is about a house, a man, and an elephant. The man is inside his hut, and the elephant is outside. The elephant first asks the man to be allowed to put his head inside the hut, then his legs, and eventually his whole body, and once entirely inside he tells the man that there is not enough room for them both. In the end the elephant is the one on the inside and the man on the outside – outside his former hut. It is the elephant who now tells the story of the hut and it seems as if everybody wants to hear about the hut more from the elephant than from the man who owned it. European languages have become like that elephant, and they often dictate the space which used to be occupied by African languages. They own the homestead otherwise called African literature.

As far as I know, and I stand to be corrected, this is the first conference on African soil, and probably the second in the world, to bring together in one place African writers and world scholars to discuss the present and the future of scholarship, literature, and knowledge in African languages. That alone would still make me say that this is a great day and a happy occasion. I am happy to be part of this vast presence from the different parts of the continent and from the Caribbean and America. How inspiring that, despite her doctor's orders to rest, Nawal El Saadawi of Egypt stirred herself from bed, together with her partner Sherif Hetata, and came here to close ranks with the rest of the continent. I have always hated the division of Africa into one below the Sahara and another above it or one which is Francophone and others which are Lusophone or Anglophone. We are here at the call of Afrophones.

Let me tell you a story. A long time ago, two young men, Meceru and Muiruri, were dressing up for a dance festival. Meceru told Muiruri: the clothes you are wearing don't fit you well, and they are certainly not suitable for the occasion. How can you go to such a festival without being dressed in a suit and tie? Muiruri started having doubts about his own clothes. Indeed, the more he now looked at himself, the shabbier his clothes seemed to be, especially when compared with the designer suits worn by his friend. Muiruri borrowed a suit and a matching tie from his friend. Muiruri was very proud of his new attire and he showed this by the way he walked: with a touch of arrogance, since it seemed to him that he carried the clothes even better than the original owner. On his arrival at the arena, every lady wanted to dance with him. Soon he felt hot, unbuttoned his shirt at the collar, and loosened the tie to air his neck. Muiruri was in the middle of

another dance when he saw Meceru approach and whisper to him, loudly enough for the dancing partner to hear: this tie that I loaned you is one of my finest and it does not look good worn so loose. Meceru even proceeded to tighten it a little. This did not amuse Muiruri and he now went to a different part of the arena. But now, while still enjoying dances with other partners, he kept making sure that the tie did not become loose again. Further, he kept looking over his shoulder, in case his benefactor turned up to embarrass him. That was how they spent the day – with Muiruri trying to keep up the sartorial expectations of his friend and at the same time trying to avoid his friend's cat-like vigilance. Muiruri relaxed only when the dance was over and they sat down to the banquet. Once again Muiruri was the object of admiration from the ladies. Then came the time for coffee. Suddenly Meceru raised his voice again: please be careful and don't spill coffee on the suit I loaned you. It is very expensive. I can even show you the receipt. Out of this story came the cautionary proverb: borrowed jewellery tires the wearer, for the owner will always find ways of hinting and drawing people's attention to the fact of his ownership.

This is how the *Observer*, one of London's major Sunday newspapers, greeted the 1965 production of Wole Soyinka's play *The Road* at the Commonwealth Arts Festival: 'a Nigerian called Wole Soyinka has done for our napping language what brigand dramatists from Ireland have done for centuries: booted it awake, rifled its pockets and scattered the loot into the middle of next week' (Gilliatt, 1965, n.p.). The newspaper was saying this in praise of Soyinka but there is a way in which it was also reminding him, along with all the writers of the famous Anglo-Irish tradition who had abandoned Gaelic for English with such enriching results, that they were welcome to add to the language but it was certainly not theirs.

You will remember how Prospero in the oft-quoted *The Tempest* told Caliban: when I first met you, you did not even know yourself, you spoke gibberish, but I gave you language and made you.[3] Instead of Caliban protesting and affirming that he did have a language prior to Prospero's presence on the island, Caliban demonstrates how well he can curse in the language.[4] Margaret Thatcher used to cite the spread of English to all parts of the world as evidence of the unique character of the English.[5]

We have not come here in order to argue whether or not we should be writing in African languages; we have not come here to argue as to whether or not African languages have adequate vocabularies; we have not come here to work out how we can best sing with other people's voices and still retain our own identities; we have not come here to debate as to how we can best use borrowed sounding systems or how we can claim them as ours. We are here in tune with the spirit of that saying that borrowed jewellery tires the wearer; and of another proverb which says that a man dances with his own kind, however small.

We have come to Asmara, Eritrea, driven by one hope: that even if it means stuttering with our tongues, we shall continue the struggle until we are able to sing sweetly in them; that we shall step out in the arena and make the call: Mother, sing for me, for I shall one day come home victorious.

This day will be marked in the calendar of history as the day when African languages from different parts of the continent came together to reassert their historical right to being the spokestongues of Africa. It is the day the languages came together to say: we are products of Africa and we are producers of Africa. Africa gave us languages and we are going to use them to sing of Africa. In short, the languages of Africa have met here in Asmara to say: the homestead called African literature belongs to us all, and we, the different African languages, are brothers and sisters, children of one parent – Africa. From this day on, whenever two or more African languages meet, they will not be doing so in hostility but in comradeship. When one of the languages calls out in song:

Whose homestead is this?
Whose homestead is this?
Whose homestead is this?
So that I may dance with abandon
Like we used to dance.

The other can answer back with pride:

This homestead belongs to us all,
This homestead belongs to us all,
This homestead belongs to us all,
If you want to dance with abandon,
Do so like we used to dance.

A homestead is very important in all world communities. A home is not just a house. A home is the house and its total environment – the hedges, the trees, the cattle boma, the granaries, the yard, the shrines – and the activities which go on in those spaces. The other thing about a home is the *way* leading in and out of the homestead. The way which starts from the homestead is what eventually links that homestead to others, to the village, to the region, to the country, and to the world. 'May you walk in the middle of the path' was how one was blessed at the start of a journey. Here, the way quite clearly means more than a physical entity.

Today's Africa, in both its positive and negative aspects, is a product of European colonialism and the struggles of African peoples against it. Colonialism was essentially a process of taking over a people's homestead and of taking people away from their way. The homestead is a person's base, and

colonialism can be seen as a process of alienating people from their total environment – their base and their way. The environment could be economic: the settler did not bring lands into Africa nor did he bring in labour. He seized the lands and then grew coffee, tea, and mined precious metals with the labour of those whose land he had already taken. When these raw materials were processed in Europe, they became available to Africa at high prices. What about the political environment? The coloniser did not bring an army from Europe: he made armies out of the divisions between African peoples and he helped set community against community, region against region, clan against clan, and they all ended up being alienated from their power base while the coloniser became empowered. They used our power to get power and then used the power against us all.

One of the most serious was the alienation from the cultural environment. The cultural environment is what carries the way, a people's way, into the world. The way is what tells people who they are. And the way is also what leads people into their collective homestead. To alienate a people from their way is to deprive the people of the power to connect with the world and their base. The way is carried by language. The quickest means of achieving the alienation of a people from the way and from their power base, then, is through language.

In the eighteenth century, a certain slave owner in Virginia, William Lynch, wrote to fellow slave owners on how to break the resistance of the slaves. And it is interesting how he quickly zeroed in on language as the most effective way of lynching the mind and the body of the enslaved. 'We must completely annihilate the mother tongue of both the new n***** and the new mule', he said, 'and institute a new language that involves the new life's work of both' (Lynch, 19991712, 20). Create a mule out of a n***** through language. The loss of language would inevitably lead to the loss of any connection with one's history and worldview. The experts, William Lynch also noted, say that 'the mind has a strong drive to correct and recorrect itself over a period of time. If it can touch substantial original historical base; and they advised us that the best way to deal with the phenomenon is to shave off the brute's mental history and create a multiplicity of phenomena of illusions'.[6] Is this essentially different from the words of Thomas B. Macaulay when he spoke of English in Indian colonial education as a means of creating a class of natives who were Indian in colour but with an English mindset, so that the class would create a buffer zone between the colonising minority and the colonised majority? In both cases, they are talking about lynching the mind of the enslaved so as to create a multiplicity of illusions, even about their own bodies and environment.[7] Alienation from one's total environment brings the disease called Not-Knowing-Oneself. Those who do not know themselves are like persons drugged by alcohol. They can be turned any way without any resistance, and William Lynch understood that quite clearly.

The struggle for independence was a struggle for a people to be in control of their entire environment. But something went wrong at the raising of the flag. Or rather, by the time we came to raise the flag, we found that the mind of the elite had been lynched – they had lost the way into the homestead and had become like those talked of in the Bible: seeing, they do not see; hearing, they do not hear.[8]

Let me give a few examples to illustrate the blindness of those who have eyes but fail to see and the deafness of those who have ears but fail to hear because of the multiplicity of illusions implanted in their minds by colonial Willie Lynch.

Africa is one of the richest continents in the world but Africa is one of the poorest continents in the world. Africa spends a huge percentage of its national income on education. But a hundred percent of the knowledge thereby generated ends up hidden in European languages. And yet it is the majority of African people who most need that knowledge. Why can't we put all that knowledge into African languages instead of the current practice of hiding it in European ones?

Another example. We know that our real strength lies in the unity of Africa and African peoples. If Africa was united today, it would become one of the most powerful entities in global affairs. In each of our countries, it was the unity of the various nationalities which made possible the achievement of independence. The spirit of unity guided us and we talked of pan-African unity. It was Europe which used to laugh at our dreams of the unity of African peoples. But look at our situation today. When European countries are uniting to the extent of even having a common parliament, a common currency, and a common passport, we in Africa are doing the exact opposite: erecting as many barriers as possible to the movement of peoples and goods across our national frontiers; and at times retreating into ethnic enclaves and even splitting along clan lines.

The mention of unity brings me to the question which I am asked most often whenever I talk about writing in African languages: writing in our languages – won't that actually deepen ethnic divisions?

It is true that in each African country there are many nationalities and they speak different languages. But we should not hide our heads in the sand like the celebrated ostrich and pretend that this is not so or that we can solve the problems of that reality by importing a language of national salvation from Europe. There was a time when humans used to think of seas, oceans, gravity, and space as barriers and enemies until they learned how to use them. Why then not pose the question of multiplicity of languages and nationalities differently? We should ask: how can the many languages be used to bring about the unity of African peoples within a country and within Africa?

Let me start with the continent. There are two ways of bringing about African unity. The colonial boundaries, the basis of the present nation-states in

Africa, often divided into different territories a people with the same history, language, and culture. Thus, we may find a group of nation-states actually sharing the same people. The best-known example is that of the Somali people split five ways so that some belong to Kenya and others to Ethiopia, Djibouti, and the Somali Republic. There are Maasai people in both Kenya and Tanzania. Similarly, the Oromo people are both in Kenya and in Ethiopia. This pattern is repeated in all Africa. The question is this: why can't we use these shared communities as the practical and moral basis of unity between our countries?

Under this scenario, the Maasai people would become a uniting force between Tanzania and Kenya, for instance. Equally well the Somali people could become the bridgeheads of unity between Djibouti, Somalia, Kenya, and Ethiopia. The Oromo people would cement the same unity by virtually nullifying the boundary between Kenya and Ethiopia. The pattern is the same from South to North Africa, from East to West Africa, and if this pattern was followed through, the shared communities would bring the entire continent together and thus turn colonial boundaries, meant to bring about divisions and weaknesses, into their opposites: bridgeheads of unity and strength. In short, we turn the shared communities and languages into links in the chain of African unity. This is obviously a matter of politics and political will and it is mostly in the hands of those wielding state power. But even here there can be grassroots pressure.

The second way – and it does not conflict with the first – is to let our languages dialogue with one another. In practical terms this means developing literature and knowledges in these languages, while at the same time encouraging translations of works into the different languages. A novel or a story written in Tigrinya could be translated into Tigre, Saho, Afar within, say, Eritrea, but even across Eritrea into Amharic, Kiswahili, Ibo, Yoruba, Chichewa, and Zulu. This means that children of the different nationalities would read and often identify with stories, characters, names, and actions set in a different region. In time, a child of one nationality may come to feel that he knows the characters and names of a different nationality almost as well as he knows those of his immediate neighbourhood. This also creates respect for the language and culture that produced such wonderful stories and situations. In time, the children in one country would find that their languages share a common culture and heritage. The same would be true of the continent as a whole. This would surely create a good and solid cultural foundation for the country and for Africa. Translations and the learning of more than one African language would be built into the school and university curricula.

The dialogue of African languages in this conference at Asmara, Eritrea, is therefore very important in its own right, but also in showing the directions in which African languages can grow and enhance our unity. Thus, the fact that we are gathered here at all calls for celebration.

Indeed, we have come here to celebrate the fact that African languages have overcome so many odds. They have been despised, made invisible in their own land and in world affairs, but they refuse to be buried alive; they still survive. In this respect, it is fortunate that this pioneering meeting has been held in this country and this region, where there has been a demonstrable continuity of written languages – from the ancient Sabaean and Ge'ez with their origins in the pre-Christian era to the present Tigrinya and other languages in Eritrea and Ethiopia that claim connections with those ancient languages. We are here to celebrate that continuity as an inspiration for the future of African languages. We are here to celebrate all the writers who have tirelessly kept faith with our languages and made that continuity possible.

But even though we are here to celebrate we must, along with it, accept the challenges first of creating a modern literature and modern systems of knowledge in our languages and then making the same available in our different languages. We have to create literature and knowledge which speak to the most urgent needs of our people for economic and political survival. This can only be achieved through a collective effort and alliances within our countries. Let me mention a few.

There is, first and foremost, the position of the various governments. African governments have to come up with progressive policies on language matters. One of the things which often stand in the way of adequate policies for African languages is the false logic of monolingualism and particularly the notion of one national language which has to swallow up all the others. A variation of this is the assumption that only the languages of the big ethnic groups can become regional and national. Every language whether spoken by a community of hundreds or by a community of millions has a right to exist and a right to develop literature and knowledge unhindered by the policies of the state. The acceptance of the unqualified equality of all the nationalities within any one country and in Africa as a whole is the prerequisite for any success of a national or even a continental language policy. If in the course of time and in practice there emerges one language which serves the needs of communication in the entire nation or region, this would be a positive development. Here we have the example of Kiswahili in East Africa. But this should not mean the active or even passive destruction of the other languages. This position is based on a simple premise. If we believe that people are the basis of development, then the language or languages that they speak are the basis of that progress and every language policy and planning should incorporate this premise. African states must also realise that the development of African languages will be seriously hindered unless there is freedom of expression of differences. Debates and even differences of thought and the clash of opposing ideas are the basis of genuine development of a healthy society. African languages must be at the frontline in the discovery and invention of knowledge in the arts, in the sciences and technology, and this kind of renaissance is impossible if people are

scared of saying what is in their minds and of concern to their hearts. In my view democracy is the best foundation for adequate state policies on language. In looking at the emerging language policies in Eritrea and South Africa, I feel enormously encouraged.

Publishers are a very important ingredient in the renaissance of African languages. We need publishers who have faith in the possibilities of our languages. We need commercial publishers willing to invest in the production of books in African languages. In this respect, we note with pride that one of the most important forces behind this conference is Africa World Press. I believe very strongly that there is an untapped market for books in African languages and it is likely to be an ever-expanding market. If an adequate readership develops in any African language, then that readership will also be the one most ready to consume books translated from other languages. Publishers in one region can exchange materials with those from other regions.

Scholars, whether from Africa or outside Africa, are another important ingredient, for they will also pose questions and conduct research on the products of these languages and thus help to set standards. It is a welcome sight to see so many scholars from all over the world who will forever be part of this historic day.

Thus, the development of African languages should not mean isolation from other languages of the earth. There is a lot that African languages can learn from those of Europe, Asia, and Latin America. African languages must open themselves out particularly to the heritage of those Africans who have now built new nations and communities in the Caribbean, America, and in the Pacific. What has been produced by Langston Hughes, George Lamming, Aimé Césaire, Margaret Walker, Amiri Baraka, Sonia Sanchez, and Toni Morrison is part of our heritage and it should be accessible to communities within Africa in their own languages. We have to build bridges to those that Kamau Brathwaite has termed 'nation languages' in the Caribbean. All the great works in European languages should be available in our languages. This means that in addition to our languages holding dialogues among themselves they must open dialogues with the other languages of the earth. We want African languages to become bridgeheads to continental African unity and to pan-African unity. But we also want them to shake hands with all human languages. Let our languages be our way into humanity's search and struggle for democracy and social justice and a spiritual culture which measures progress not in terms of those on the mountaintop but in terms of those whom Frantz Fanon identified as the 'wretched of the earth'.

With all that, then, I believe that the biggest challenge is still to writers and intellectuals of Africa. We have to leave this meeting determined to do more for our languages and in our languages. I have said before and I say it again that we must do for our languages what all other intellectuals have done for theirs by producing the best that can be written and thought. Let us therefore

make sure that when we leave Asmara we shall be armed with a united vision of new beginnings. May this conference be the beginning of greater things to come for our languages, for Africa, for the world? Thaai.

Notes

1 This is an English translation from Gĩkũyũ of the keynote speech given at the conference 'Against All Odds: African Languages and Literatures into the 21st Century', held in Asmara, Eritrea, 11 January 2000.
2 This is Kenyatta's rendering of the story of the Arab and his camel.
3 'I pitied thee, | Took pains to make thee speak, taught thee each hour | One thing or other: when thou didst not, savage, | Know thine own meaning, but wouldst gabble like | A thing most brutish, I endow'd thy purposes | With words that made them known. (William Shakespeare, *The Tempest* 1.2.353–358).
4 'You taught me language; and my profit on't | Is, I know how to curse. The red plague rid you | For learning me your language!' (Shakespeare, *The Tempest* 1.2.362–364).
5 See, among others, Thatcher (1999).
6 Lynch, 1999, 20. The historical accuracy of the story is contested. But whether real or not, it illustrates the point.
7 I have discussed the connection between language and the other realms of our being in my book *Decolonizing the Mind* (Ngũgĩ, 1986).
8 Matthew 13:13; Mark 8:18.

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